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The Lily of St. Erne.

BY MRS. L. CROW.

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN A TRAVELER MAKES HIS FIRST APPEARANCE IN LONDON AND TO THE READER.

"WHERE to, sir?" asked the cabman, whose Hansom had just been engaged by one of the passengers pouring out of a crowded train from Liverpool. "Where to, sir?"

The gentleman, who had the bronzed features, well-developed muscles, and lithe, easy movements of a man accustomed to an out-door life, did not answer the question till it was repeated. He was leaning forward, alternately surveying the huge glass-roofed terminus, and the motley throngs of people hurrying to and fro, with the amused and interested air of one to whom such a scene has the charm of novelty. When he did reply, it was with a smile at his own ignorance.

"Where to? 'Pon my word, I don't know. Take me to some hotel; you can find a decent one, I suppose? And be quick about it, for I am half starved."

The cabman, who had been furtively surveying his fare, and drawing his own conclusions from the stranger's rather unconventional attire, touched his hat, and ventured another query.

"West End or city, sir? Some gents like one, some the t'other. You're a stranger in London, I s'pose?"

A slight nod checked his disposition to be too familiar.

"My good fellow, I must leave to you the choice of locality; only take me where I am most likely to get a glimpse of the sky, and a breath of air. Does the sun never shine on this murky metropolis?"

"Lor' bless ye, sir, there ain't a healthier place in the world than this 'ere London!" he was emphatically told; but gaining no other response than an incredulous shrug, cabby clambered to his seat, and made at a brisk pace for one of the palatial hotels to be found in the aristocratic purlieus of Belgravia. He had decided in his own mind that he had got hold of one of those fortunate men who occasionally find their way back from the "golden Americas," with pockets well-lined with the rich ore they have toiled to gain. Acting on this belief, and the reputed readiness of the so-called *lucky* fellows to submit to be fleeced, he asked, when his fare alighted, nearly treble the sum to which he was entitled for the journey.

But he fell into a strange error when he imagined that the frank good-humor on which he traded evinced the weakness of a nature easily duped. The dark brows of the stranger contracted, the curiously bright eyes subjected his surly face to a keen scrutiny, and he was sharply catechised.

"It seems a large sum to demand for so short a ride! If it is justly your due, you shall have it, but I should like to be satisfied on that point before I pay you."

The stranger's temperate manner encouraged cabby to make a saucy retort.

"Do you think I wish to cheat you?"

"How can I tell?" he was quietly asked.

"It's what my Lord Miffington always gives me for bringing him here," said the man, in testy tones; "and no real gentleman as knows hisself would think of offering me less."

"Then I am not a gentleman, according to your definition of the word," was the prompt reply; "for I never submit to imposition, if I know it."

"No gentleman?—of course you're not, or you wouldn't try to wrong a poor chap like me out of his hard earnings," said the cabby, who was beginning to lose his temper, now he saw no advantages to be reaped by civility.

A dark flush dyed the stranger's cheeks, and his hands clenched ominously; but still he restrained himself, and, turning from the driver, he appealed to the bystanders.

"Will any one kindly tell me how much I ought to pay this man?"

A young officer, who was leisurely strolling by, on his way home from a parade, paused as the appeal fell on his ear. He had heard the greater part of the colloquy, and sympathized with the stranger: yet, with an Englishman's national unwillingness to interfere in other folks' affairs, he was still hesitating, when a waiter from the hotel came forward and gave the required information.

"You are sure of this?" he was pointedly asked. "*Quite sure* that the sum you name is the correct one?"

As soon as he had received the required assurance, the traveler counted out the precise number of coins of the realm, and offered them to cabby, by whom they were pocketed after some grumbling, and an attempt to play the bully, that was checked by something in the air and attitude his fare was taking.

As he turned to clamber to his perch, he was seized by the collar and swung sharply round; and now there was a look in the stranger's face that told how he had played with fire, when he sought to dupe the hot-blooded young fellow in whose grasp he was writhing.

"Stay, my man! You have not had all I owe you! Scoundrel! do you think I shall let your attempt to rob me go unpunished? Give me his whip, some one, and I'll teach him how we serve roguish drivers at Fr'isco!" (San Francisco.)

A *fracas* was now impending, but the officer was too generous not to make an effort to prevent it; and, throwing away his cigar, he stepped to the side of the angry Californian, and laid a persuasive hand on his broad shoulders.

"My dear sir, take a Londoner's advice, and let the scamp go! There's no honor to be won in a street row; you will only create a scene, and give your opponent the advantage!"

At first he was heard with displeasure. The stranger frowned, and asked him what he meant. "Is it your London fashion to let any fellow cheat you?"

AN INOPPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

"But he has *not* cheated you, for you were too sharp for him; and as you have saved your pocket, you may as well spare him the punishment. He has had a wholesome fright, and is no match for you. Besides, the police would be here directly, and you would not care to spend your first night in town in studying the interior of a cell at a station-house!"

The irate fare drew himself up haughtily, as if to ask, "Who would dare arrest me?" but the pleasant, yet half-quizzical look of his adversary made him feel ashamed of his impetuosity, and he flung the trembling cabman from him.

"It's hard to let him go," he muttered, regretfully, "for he richly deserves a thrashing! But you are quite right, sir," he frankly added; "it would be a folly to commence my English career with such a quarrel, especially as it would be at variance with your customs; though I still think our summary method of settling a dispute the best."

"If might and right always went together, I should agree with you," was the laughing reply; "and, I dare say, it answers well enough in unsettled countries, where every man must take care of himself. But here the law arranges our differences for us; and you know the old adage—'At Rome we must be Romans.'"

Raising his hat, the officer was passing on, leaving the new arrival to follow his luggage, which the porters were carrying into the hotel, but his steps were arrested by an earnest entreaty that he would remain.

"Don't go yet! Yours is the first friendly voice I have heard, and I should like to know you better! Come and try some of the cigarros I have in one of my trunks, and give me another word or two of good counsel. But you don't know me," the gentleman added, as he saw that his new acquaintance hesitated. "My name is Max Haveryng, an Englishman by descent, a Californian by birth and education. I am visiting the mother-country for a holiday, and to look up my paternal relatives. As yet I don't know a soul, and it's such wretched work dining alone, that I hope you'll not refuse my invitation!"

He spoke with such a pleasant, winning warmth, that British reserve thawed, and Captain Renton answered with equal cordiality:

"I regret to be obliged to say that I have an engagement for the evening, which I must keep; but I have an hour to spare, which I shall be happy to spend with you. I am a captain in the Guards, and my name is Renton—Charlie Renton."

The gentlemen shook hands, and went into the hotel together. The rather fastidious Guardsman was not in the habit of fraternizing with strangers; but he had not been able to resist Max Haveryng's genial manner; and their mutual liking increased when the cigars had been unpacked, pronounced excellent, and some whisky-toddy imbibed to keep out the fogs of the cheerless March day, while a substantial meal was being prepared for the hungry traveler.

Max was an amusing companion, for he was young, bold, and light-hearted, and he came fresh from one of those half-peopled countries, miles and miles of whose virgin soil still remained untrod; while Captain Renton was sufficiently romantic and adventurous to listen with interest and question him eagerly when he described life as it is in the Far West, with all those vivid and graphic details that only eye-witnesses can give.

But a closer observer than the gay, thoughtless Max would have noticed how, even in their unreserved chat, the difference of education and disposition made itself known. Captain Renton said so little about himself, that, when the young men parted, Max scarcely knew more concerning him than the name and address on the card he had thrust in his pocket; while the Californian, with unconscious egotism, had laid his inmost thoughts bare. He had nothing to conceal, and so he spoke openly of his position and prospects. He had been an orphan for some years. His father—a younger son—had emigrated during the first rush to the gold-fields, and, without joining in any of the wild speculations in which so many embarked, had contrived to amass money and make friends. He had married the pretty daughter of a Spanish merchant of Monterey, and settled down on a small estate he purchased in the valley of the Sacramento.

"And there, I suppose, I ought to be at this moment," added Max, thoughtfully, "looking after my cattle, and increasing my stock; but I have grown tired of living alone, or of varying my monotonous life with a few weeks in one of the cities. I am no gambler, and there is little else to amuse one there. Besides, I am not what you would call rich, and the loss of a few hundred dollars would be serious; so, I was debating whether I should join an expedition to the Society Islands, or—don't laugh at me; you can't understand how wretched it is to have no society half the year round but one's own thoughts—*get married;* when I came by chance upon an old journal of my father's, kept while he was a lad staying at the home of his ancestors; and the whim seized me to come and view for myself the spots he describes so glowingly."

"A very good idea; travel enlarges a man's views, and makes him more practical," said Captain Renton, approvingly. "But how did *la belle fiances* take the separation?"

Max colored and laughed.

"Oh, she opened her dark eyes wonderingly, sighed a little, bade me take care of myself, and bring her all the latest fashions. I am not actually affianced to my cousin Elvira; so you see, the affair is not as serious as you imagined."

"*Je comprends;* it hasn't reached the heartbreaking stage. You are still cool enough to be aware that she is not all angel!"

"Nay, by San Jago! she is incomparably beautiful!" cried Max, with boyish enthusiasm. "Such eyes, such teeth; and her skin is wax-like in its purity! There is not a handsomer woman in the State! But still—"

"Oh, lukewarm lover, to end a summary of his lady's perfections with a *but!*" was the jesting comment upon his speech.

"I cannot help it," Max replied, with sudden gravity. "When I am with her—Elvira's father is wealthy and hospitable—when I am with her, I gaze and adore, and fall into jealous furies whenever I see that she does not favor me more than half a dozen others; but when I get back to *Aquas Dolces*—my own little location—I find myself asking how Elvira would contrive to exist there. I cannot picture her delicate white hands sewing buttons on my hunting-shirt, or cooking my supper: and what society would one have with a wife who never reads or cares to walk abroad, and would take no interest in a fellow's pursuits? Bah! she will have married some luckier man before I get back to America; so why do I talk of her?"

Captain Renton smiled as he rose to depart, and hummed the old song—

"If she be not fair for me,
What care I how fair she be?"

"Comfort yourself, *mon ami*," he added; "for I can perceive that *la donna* has not made a very lasting impression on you. If we should meet again before you return to California, I shall not be at all surprised to find you arranging to carry an English bride with you."

"*If* we meet again!" Max repeated. "Why, I hope we shall see a great deal of each other. I can't afford to let a friend drift away, while I am so wholly at sea, as I feel to be in this noisy London. Will you not smoke another cigar with me to-morrow?"

But Captain Renton shook his head.

"I am only in town for the day. If you will come and dine with me at Aldershott, where I am on duty, I shall be most happy; but I thought you spoke of leaving town immediately."

"Why, so I shall; and therefore I suppose I must decline your invitation, though I should to like have a peep at the great dusty camp of which your nation seems so proud."

"Then why not say yes? There will be a review on the Long Valley on Saturday, and I should like to make you confess that our soldiers are worth seeing when they play the game of war."

"I'd be delighted to accept," said Max, frankly; "but I fancy it would not be polite to my father's relatives to roam about and enjoy myself till I have paid my respects to them. As soon as I return from Cornwall I shall look you up."

"Cornwall, did you say?" and Captain Renton looked decidedly inquisitive. "I also have friends in that county, whom I propose visiting—probably in the course of a week or two."

"Then it's just possible that we may meet there. I hope we shall, though the name of the particular village for which I am bound has escaped my memory. Must you really be going, just, too, as they have brought a dinner that looks so appetizing?"

"Don't let me detain you from it," said Captain Renton, shaking hands with the hospitable Californian; "and don't forget your promise to look me up at Aldershott."

Max nodded.

"Always providing we do not run against each other earlier. By the by, you have not given me that word of advice."

"No, indeed!" was the laughing reply; "there's no occasion for it, while you can take care of yourself so well, especially against the attack of extortionate cabmen. There is one thing, however, I will suggest, as I am sure you are too sensible to be offended."

But he paused and looked at Max inquiringly, till encouraged with a laughing "Say on, Macduff!"

"Go and see one of our West End tailors before you leave London, for the fashions of San Francisco vary in some particulars from ours, and no man likes to look peculiar when he first makes the acquaintance of his relatives."

Max surveyed his loose suit, compared it with the well-made attire of the Guardsman, and reddened a little at the contrast. But he thanked him warmly for the suggestion, and followed him to the door, saying: "You may as well give me the address of your Cornish friends, for I shall call upon you while you are with them, if they will not look aghast at the intrusion."

Captain Renton scribbled it on a leaf torn from his pocket-book, but remarked at the same time, "I suppose I ought to warn you that, as I am barely tolerated at Ruan Abbey myself, there may not be a very gracious reception accorded to one of my acquaintances."

"Shall I chance that?" he was frankly asked, "or would you rather I stayed away?"

Something like a jealous spasm shot through Charlie Renton's heart. The beautiful Eleanor, for whose sake he was ready to leave London at the commencement of the season, was rarely kind, and always coy. Sometimes he could have sworn that she loved him; but more frequently she held him at bay, with a haughty reserve that maddened him. What if this handsome, dashing Californian found that favor in her eyes that he could never obtain?

Too proud, however, to let Max see that he feared a rival, he answered, "Come, if you feel any desire to see beautiful scenery or enjoy deep-sea fishing. You can have both in the neighborhood of Ruan Abbey; and if I cannot promise you a welcome from its owners, I can get you the best of quarters at Jenifer Madron's, in the village; so I'll not say good-by, but *au revoir*."

"I wish I had asked him where this Abbey is located," mused Max, as he sat enjoying his wine, when the cloth had been cleared. "The name sounds so familiar that I must have seen it in my father's journal. I'll hunt it out."

Accordingly, through page after page of the faded and almost illegible manuscript the Californian pored, till he found the passage he sought. It was a brief account of a tour along the coast, made in the writer's boyhood, and contained these words:

"Rode with my cousin, John Penruan, as far as the Abbey, from which he takes his name. He was half offended because I said it was a pity that such a fine building should be falling to decay, and quite fiercely asked me what a man could do who had no money. He is a strange, unsociable fellow, and I have been warned to avoid him."

Beneath these lines, and evidently written some years afterward was the following note:

"John Peruan is rich enough now to rebuild the old Abbey, for news has reached me that he is married to the widow of a millionaire."

"It's the same!" said Max, sagely nodding his head; "and I must contrive to time my visit to Ruan Abbey so that I may meet this pleasant, gentlemanly, new acquaintance of mine. I wonder what he meant by saying that his presence is only tolerated at the Abbey? Perhaps wealth has not improved Mr. Penruan; but if he is not a genial host, why does Captain Renton insist on visiting him? It strikes me that I am just turning over the first page of a romance, of which the gallant captain is the hero; but I shall know more about it when I honor Mr. Penruan with a call.

Fresh from the unquestioning good-fellowship of Californian life, and imbued with a notion that every one who had known and loved his excellent father would, for his sake, rejoice to see his son, Max Haveryng made no further delay in town than was involved in a visit to Poole's ere he went down into Cornwall. But a lapse of thirty or forty years had effected great alterations. The lovely scenes described in the journal of the elder Haveryng were there, just clothed in the first soft tints of early spring, but the friends of his boyhood were dispersed or dead. His name was almost forgotten, and though the people to whom Max recalled it were civilly pleased to see him, no one testified that cordiality he had anticipated. It was, therefore, with a feeling of unwonted depression that he found himself one evening ringing the huge bell in the porch of Ruan Abbey, and speculating, the while, whether it would not have been wiser to give up all hope of being welcomed by a kinsman, and return to London.

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING THAT THE TRAVELER WAS NEITHER LODGED AT RUAN ABBEY, NOR AT JENIFER MADRON'S.

By the brisk little woman who answered his summons, Max was informed that the family was from home. The master had gone to Penzance to attend a meeting of an archæological society, and had taken the mistress with him and Miss Eleanor, and they would be away for a week certain, if not longer.

On the whole, Max was more relieved than sorry that his interview must be postponed with the redoubtable gentleman, whose name had never been mentioned in his hearing without a shrug or an exclamation, the precise meaning of which he had not been able to learn. People are chary of spreading evil reports when the object of them is immensely wealthy and revengeful; and it was well understood that it was an unwise act to offend Squire Penruan.

"No, I'll not leave my name," Max said, when the woman left in charge of the Abbey suggested it. "I am a stranger here, and prefer to introduce myself to Mr. Penruan when he returns home. I am told that the neighborhood is very picturesque, so I'll amuse myself with exploring it. I suppose I can get a bed in the village? By the by, where is it? I have not seen any signs of it yet."

The housekeeper, who was attracted by Max's handsome face and lively manner, would dearly have liked to offer him the hospitality of the Abbey till her master came back, but she dared not do this, and was obliged to content herself with explaining that there were not any houses nearer than the few cottages grouped on and around a rugged promontory, about half a mile away, called St. Erne's Point. Just beyond the point, however, there lived a decent widow named Madron, who sometimes accommodated artists or invalids, and the gentleman might be able to get a bed at her house.

"Of course I shall," said Max, cheerfully; "for it is to this identical old lady I am recommended. I am sorry I have kept you out in the cold so long. If you will tell me how to find my way to St. Erne, I'll not detain you any longer."

The housekeeper looked out into the misty twilight and cogitated.

"I'm afraid, sir, you'll have to follow the road, though it's more than a mile round, for, you see, it's growing duskish; and, even in broad daylight, the path down the cliffs is steep and awkward for anyone that's not used to it. If either of the men were at home they could guide you, but they're all away to the fair at—"

"Tell me where this path is to be found," said Max, "and I'll go and have a look at it. I've walked so many miles to-day, that I'm not in the humor to add another to the number, if I can help it."

The woman gave him the necessary directions, coupling with them the assurance that he would find the longest route the safest; then, shivering in the raw air of the cold spring evening, she went back to her cosy room; while Max, whistling a lively air, shouldered his little traveling-bag, and strode to the edge of the tall cliffs, on whose summit the Abbey was built.

A tiny track, scarcely discernible by the fading light, sloped downward betwixt two huge masses of serpentine rock; and, after descending cautiously for some fifty paces, a sudden turn in the path enabled him to obtain a very pretty view of the beach far below him. He could hear the measured beat of the waves as they rolled in upon the shingle, and the voices of a dozen fishermen, who, as they strolled home together, were lustily chanting an old sea-song with excellent effect. Half unconsciously, Max Haveryng hummed the chorus, as, mellowed by the distance, it came floating toward him, not a thought of danger troubling his hardy spirit as he pursued his way, and never doubting that every step was carrying him nearer and nearer to the lights that were beginning to twinkle in the fishers' dwellings.

But presently, to his great vexation, he found all further progress barred by a steep descent, so precipitous that it was impossible to obtain good hold. He had evidently contrived to diverge from the regular track, and must retrace his way to the spot where he had left it—no very pleasing prospect to a weary man, wholly unacquainted with the locality, and still further bewildered by the deepening gloom. Yet, unhesitatingly, Max plodded on, sometimes stumbling over the sharp crags, sometimes ascending, sometimes descending, till once more he stood on a projection, from which the beach and the sea were distinctly visible.

With an impatient sigh, he leaned his back against the cliff, and rested awhile. In spite of his dogged perseverance, he could not flatter himself that he had regained the track, and the question now was whether it would be easier to go down or up before it became too dark to accomplish either. It was decided for him more speedily than pleasantly. As he stepped forward to examine the face of the hights that towered above him, a stone, on which he had too incautiously stepped, rolled from under his foot,

and Max lost his equilibrium. He tried hard to regain it, but so narrow was the ledge on which he had been standing, that it was impossible. Still he did not lose his presence of mind, but, as he rolled over and over, grasped at whatever might assist in breaking his fall, and finally contrived to clutch a mass of rock, to which he clung, bruised and panting, uttering hoarse cries for help, which no one heard but the wild birds his voice startled from their sleep.

He made desperate efforts to raise himself onto the rock, but his arms had lost their power, and one of his ankles gave him exquisite pain. He could not hold on much longer, unless some one came to his aid, and who would—nay, who could? Even if it had been light enough for any one on the beach to descry him, it would have been impossible to render any efficient help, for his wanderings had carried him to one of the most inaccessible parts of the cliffs.

And yet he was so near one of the cottages, a quaint little structure, perched on a small, three-cornered bit of level ground, and approached from the beach by some rudely-cut steps, that he could hear a female voice singing "The Sands of Dee." Strange thoughts were evoked by the plaintive song. Would any one seek for him, as they sought for the golden-haired Mary? Would *his* final resting-place be those hungry waters, whose ceaseless lapping now sounded so near, or would his mangled remains molder in some cleft of these darkly-veined cliffs, and no one ever learn his untimely fate?

A sob burst from his laboring chest, and he made one more mighty effort to raise himself. Once on the summit of this projection, he would be in comparative safety until the morning dawned, when his shouts or signals would surely bring some one to the rescue; but the effort was in vain, and he felt that he was rapidly growing exhausted.

And yet, oh, heavens! he was so young to die—and to die thus! He glanced upward; the stars were beginning to pierce the vail of night, and look down upon him. Was it in mockery, or to teach him resignation? He knew not, for his relaxing hands were slowly, surely slipping from their hold; he felt that he was falling—not as before, from crag to crag, but down, down in one swift rush; and then he remembered no more, but lost himself in a troubled vision, wherein he wandered in the primeval forests of America, pursued by Indians, whose arrows were being launched at his quivering flesh.

At last his tormentors vanished, and he awoke from the long trance of insensibility. But still those torturing pains were in his head and limbs, forcing from him a moan of agony.

It was echoed by a feminine voice, to which another, in sharper tones, murmured a rebuke; and then Max heard some one say, in low, thrilling accents, "I could not help it! He suffers so frightfully, it rends my heart to see him!"

"Take the child away," said some one else, "'tis no fit sight for her."

"But I'll not be taken away, Uncle Dan!" replied the sweet, girlish voice, which was surely the same that Max had heard singing the plaintive ballad. "How can I be content to leave him till he is easier? Don't sit by so calmly! Surely you can do something more for him?"

"Nay, nay, child; but I cannot," said the old man. "And 'twouldn't be o' no use if I could. T'ain't in natur' that he should live after falling from Ruan cliffs, as he must ha' done. I ha' set his broken leg—and let old Dannel Calynack alone for doing that as well as a town surgeon—and we can't do no more."

"Only stand here and see him writhe with suffering! Oh! but it is too terrible!" sighed the girl. "Why did you not let me send for Doctor Treloar? It is not too late to do that now. Dear Uncle Dan, pray go and seek some one who will do my errand, and I will pay them handsomely!"

"Nay," said the other female; "Doctor Treloar must not come here; you are mad to propose it! Let the stranger be carried hence if he must have further advice."

"What!" cried the girl, indignantly; "jolted over miles of rough road in a cart, to die, perhaps, on the way; or else consigned to the stifling hovel and rude hands of one of the fishwives! I will not hear of such barbarity. It was I who saw the stranger fall, as I ran to meet Uncle Dan; but for this, he might have lain helpless and untended till the morning; and having found him, it is plainly our duty to take care of him till he recovers, or—"

She could not bring herself to name the alternative; but her reasoning was not convincing to her companion, who answered with great significance:

"In ordinary cases I should agree with you, but there are your own risks to be considered. Do you quite forget these?"

"I cannot always be thinking of myself!" was the hasty reply; "nor will I let any personal consideration teach me to be unfeeling."

The elder female commenced a tart response; but ere she had uttered half a dozen reproachful words, the old fisherman, who had designated himself as Daniel Calynack, gravely interfered.

"Do 'ee be quiet, Esther, wench; there's no harm done by letting the child have her way, for the poor lad's a'most at his last. Let 'un die in peace, my *soas*—let 'un die in peace!"

Max heard the girlish voice breathe an inarticulate murmur, half sigh, half sob; and, in spite of his aches and pains, he longed to be able to relieve her of her generous anxiety on his account. If he could but shake off the numbing faintness that pervaded every sense, how gladly would he reassure her!

"Poor youth!" said the elder female, approaching his prostrate form, and speaking with more pity than she had hitherto evinced. "Dan is right; he will not trouble us much longer; he is dying."

"Indeed, I am not!" Max feebly ejaculated, the hollow, far-away sound of his own voice startling him. "I have had a nasty tumble, but I'm going to get over it."

There must have been something ludicrous in this assertion, or else in the effect it had upon the watchers, both of whom recoiled, startled, and discomfited, for a burst of low, rippling laughter broke the silence that followed.

It was, however, instantly repressed; there was some whispering between the inmates of the cottage, and then, as Max began to dreamily gaze around, the elder female returned to the low pallet on which he had been laid, and firmly but gently pressed down the lids of his aching eyes.

"Not to-night," she said. "Carry the light into the other room, Uncle Dan, and then come and make your patient understand that he will grow feverish if he attempts to talk."

"But just let him tell us where his friends are to be found," Max heard the girl interpose. "He may have a mother with whom we ought to communicate immediately. You are a stranger here, are you not, sir?" she added, addressing herself to the sufferer. "Will you give us the address of your relatives, that we may send for them? Where are they to be found?" she queried again, on receiving no answer.

"In heaven!" said Max, confusedly. "Address did you say? Aquas Dolces, valley of the Sacramento!"

"He is delirious, my dearest child; do come away!" whispered the elder female; but Max distinctly felt a warm tear fall upon his cheek before her wishes were complied with, and he was left to the care of Daniel Calynack, whoever that worthy individual might be.

How time sped on for the following week or two he scarcely knew, for the injuries he had received in his fall were such serious ones that he was too ill to raise himself from his pillow. But he was conscious that a gray-haired, weather-beaten old man in the rough garb of a fisherman, rarely left his side; and that once or twice a face, so fair and sweet as to be almost angelic, had bent over him as he lay. But when the feverish symptoms disappeared, and though weak and helpless as a child, he was clear-headed and capable of conversing rationally once more, the cottage appeared to have no other inmate than the fisherman, who sat on a low stool at the foot of the bed, repairing one of his nets.

"I am afraid I have given you a great deal of trouble," said Max, the first time he felt equal to an open conversation with the silent but pleasant-looking old Cornishman.

"Nay, nay; not hafe so much as them dog-fish, rot 'em!" was the reply. "Look'ee here, at the rents they ha' made in these meshes—more nor I shall fill up in another hour, I knows."

"I'll buy you a new net, if you'll only put that down, and talk to me. I have so much to ask you," cried Max, eagerly.

"Talk away, lad, if it don't hurt 'ee; and keep your money in your pocket. I don't want to be paid for listening."

"Tell me, then, how long have I been here?"

Dan put his thumb against his teeth, and mused.

"Ever sin' last Friday was a week.

"And how and where did you discover me?"

"How?—why, doubled up. Where?—not a hundred yards from my own door. I should have passed ye, though, for I'd my oars and my nets on my shoulder—a-coming up, I was, fro' the boat—if she hadn't 'a' said—"

"Who is *she?*" interrupted Max.

"If she hadn't 'a' said," the old man repeated, 'What's that a-lying there, Uncle Dan?' And then—"

"And then," his impatient hearer went on, "you brought me here, and have nursed me most kindly ever since. God bless you for it! But who was it that first saw me?"

Dan threaded his huge needle with coarse twine very deliberately before he replied.

"Well, if you ha' answered the question yoursen, why need *I?* 'Tain't my grandmer nor my great aunts that calls me uncle!"

"Then it was your niece to whom I am indebted. I should like to thank her. Where is she?"

"Gone back to where she came from."

"Then she does not live with you?" said the disappointed Max.

"Nows and thens she do," was the brief answer.

"Is it because I am here that she has left you?"

"Ain't you a-talking more nor's good for you?" queried Dan, instead of replying to the question.

"If you think so, why don't you answer me more directly? Is it on my account that your niece has quitted the cottage? If I am in the way—if I am trespassing too long on your hospitality—pray tell me so at once!"

"Nay, lad," said Dan, coming to his bedside. "You're as welcome as a fair wind; and I'd be loath to let ye go till I've cured ye out and out! The child went, because Esther said it was best for her; and now ye maunt ask me no more questions about her, for I *sha'n't answer them!* It's time ye had something to eat, and I mun go and cook it."

"I dare say old Dan is quite right to keep his pretty niece out of the way," Max concluded; "for if she is as charming as she seemed to me when I was half delirious, I should certainly not be able to resist falling in love with her. Still I should like to see her once again, if only to ascertain whether my eyes played me false when they pictured her so beautiful."

That she had not removed to any great distance he felt convinced, for every evening he heard the rustle of feminine garments, and the whispering of voices in the little kitchen adjoining his chamber; and dainty dishes were served up to him, as his appetite improved, which certainly surpassed old Dan's culinary skill to concoct. Yet neither the female called Esther, nor the gentle girl who had so generously compassionated his sufferings, came near him; and, having nothing else to do, he gave way more and more to the curiosity that tormented him.

Sometimes he felt indignant that his honor should be suspected by the relatives of this fair young creature; sometimes, in more rational mood, he commended their prudence in secluding her. But, in each and every mood, he longed to behold her; and at last, chance gave him the opportunity he sought.

Lying one evening in the moonlight, listening to the sounds that proclaimed her presence in the adjoining room, he heard Dan quit the cottage on some errand. Had his niece accompanied him? No. He could hear a light footfall occasionally, and the firelight that gleamed through a crack in the door was obscured, ever and anon, as she flitted to and fro.

Should he call her? Should he entreat her to come and speak to him? Nay, the sound of his voice would probably be a signal for her flight, and he banished the idea. But he could not be content without an effort to break down the barrier raised between them; and seizing a huge herbal, the only book Dan had been able to find for his amusement, he dropped it heavily upon the floor.

As he had expected, the door flew open, and the girl peered doubtfully into the room; but it was so dark that she could but just distinguish the outlines of the form stretched on Dan's bed.

She spoke; but receiving no answer, she stepped nearer and nearer to the invalid, murmuring to herself the while, "He is worse; he has fainted! What shall I do to revive him?"

Though half ashamed of the ruse he was practicing, Max lay perfectly still, until her trembling fingers touched his wrist, and then he ventured to relieve her fears.

"Thanks!" he whispered; "I am better. But pray do not go away!" for already she was retreating. "You cannot know how I have longed to see you, and thank you for your sympathy! Ah, do not leave me yet! If you could imagine how miserably depressing it is to lie here, day after day, seeing no one, speaking with no one but old Dan, you would take pity on me!"

The face, which the hood of a waterproof wrapper partially concealed, was turned toward him while he spoke, and Max mentally anathematized the darkness that hindered him from beholding it more clearly.

"You must be lonely, indeed!" she said, in commiserating accents. "Why not apprise your friends where you are?"

"Because I have none in England. I am a Californian, traveling here for my own amusement. I do not know a creature who would care to come to me!"

"Then you were not raving when you talked of the Sacramento and San Francisco?" and she insensibly lessened the distance she had been so carefully preserving. "And you will be returning to your own country, I suppose, as soon as you are well enough?"

"Most certainly I shall."

Before he could say another wovd, Dan Calynack put his head in at the door, growling out something between a reproach and an inquiry; but, with an imperative gesture, he was silenced.

"*I choose* to talk to your patient, uncle Dan; and I shall come to see him to-morrow, and bring him some books. He is a stranger—an American; and—and—"

She finished her sentence in a whisper, intended for the ears of the fisherman alone; but Max felt certain that he caught the words, "*There is nothing to be feared from him.*"

Dan gave a dissatisfied cough, for which he was summarily dismissed.

"Go away, and light your lamp, uncle. I will come and talk to you directly."

As the old man, with evident reluctance, obeyed, his reputed niece turned once more to Max.

"Can you give me some proof that you are what you represent yourself?"

"My pocket-book contains papers that will attest my veracity," he answered. "I had it in my possession before I fell."

"Uncle Dan found it at the foot of the cliffs, together with a traveling-bag, which must be your property. You shall show me the proofs I require, and tell me your name, to-morrow. Till then, adieu."

She was gone, but she had left one token of her presence, which Max contrived to secure, and examined at his leisure. It was a handkerchief, slightly scented with a fashionable *extract*, and marked with a floral monograph, which he was not sufficiently versed in ladies' work to decipher. Was it customary for the nieces of Cornish fishermen to carry such dainty articles as this little *mouchoir?*

Max Haveryng was one of the most practical of men, andapt to find very matter-of-fact reasons for everything that perplexed him. But he had heard words spoken that implied a mystery, and he could not help dwelling on them more persistently than before, now that this square of perfumed cambric was lying beneath his pillow, and the refined accents of the young girl haunting his memory.

Would she come, as she had promised, and should he learn her true history from her own lips?

He would have questioned Dan, but the old man was more silent than ever, though Max contrived to startle him out of his stolidity by one suggestion he hazarded.

"Dan, I verily believe that the young lady you call your niece is the much vaunted beauty of the Abbey—the belle of whom I heard long before I reached this part of Cornwall, Eleanor Penruan."

The old fisherman stared at him in amazement, but shrugged his broad shoulders when Max had finished speaking, and answered, quietly enough: "My lad, ye haven't got the craze out of your brain yet. Miss Eleanor is no more like my little lassie than you are, and she's too proud to cross the thrastle" (threshold) "of Dan Calynack's cottage."

"Tell me, then—"

But Dan was gone before his guest could get any further; and Max went to sleep that night with the word "to-morrow" upon the lips that impatience had fevered.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH MAX HAVERYING HEARS AND SEES MUCH THAT PERPLEXES HIM.

The sun shone pleasantly through the queer little latticed casement of Max Haveryng's chamber on the following morning, and the day was so warm as to warrant him insisting that the door, opening into the adjoining room, should be kept ajar, that he might watch for the arrival his promised visitor. Never had the weariness of lying helplessly there seemed greater than on this forenoon, when, having performed the toilet of a sick man, with a precision which made the deep-set beady eyes of old Dan twinkle comically, he lay awaiting the arrival of the young girl, whose charms—imagined rather than beheld—had taken such a hold on his excited brain.

Would she come alone, or would the person she had called Esther preside at the interview? These were some of the questions with which he tormented himself as hour after hour passed away, and still no one entered the cottage but a fisherman who came a-borrowing, and some children who liked to hover about its good-natured owner. Even the ordinary sounds on the beach died away as the god of day began to draw toward the west, and nothing broke the silence but the steady wash of the rising tide, to which Max listened till lulled by it into a doze.

When he awoke, the last rays of the sun were glinting through the open door, and falling upon a

figure seated upon the roughly-made three-legged stool which formed the customary resting-place of old Dan.

Max regarded this figure doubtfully, drew his hands across his eyes, then looked again, yet still found it difficult to believe that he saw aright. Certainly he beheld the same sweet face, of which he had caught a transient glimpse on the preceding evening, but it was framed in the somber cap of a widow.

At the feet of his visitor lay the hooded wrapper she had been wearing, and a slight girlish form was revealed, garbed in the deepest but simplest mourning. No attempt at ornament relieved it, not even the folds and puffs with which the ladies of the present day contrive to embellish even the tokens of bereavement; and the very simplicity of the high body and long, loose sleeves lent additional youthfulness to her appearance.

Involuntarily Max glanced at the little hands folded in her lap, and looking purely white as Parian marble against the sable dress. Yes, there shone the golden circlet, the emblem of matrimony; and once more his eyes sought her face, as if to learn there how it could be that this delicate young creature was not only a wife, but a widow.

We have already said that she was pale, but that word poorly denotes the tint of a complexion, so healthy, although so colorless, that the crimson of her lips gained in intensity by the contrast. There was something absolutely childlike in her blue orbs, with their native but dreamy expression, as though the womanly instincts of her spirit were not awakened; yet the pose of her small head was so dignified, that Max was, oddly enough, reminded of a picture he had once beheld of a captive queen enduring the taunts of her conquerors.

She bore the long scrutiny the young man bestowed upon her with tolerable composure; but at last the steady set of her rosy mouth seemed to be on the point of relaxing into an amused smile, and, becoming conscious of his rudeness, he stammered an embarrassed, "I beg your pardon."

"Do not mention it," she answered, demurely, yet with just such a dash of *hauteur* or independence of his good opinions, as a princess might have testified when condescending to visit one of her subjects. "I saw that you were scarcely awake, and confused me with Uncle Dan; so I thought it only kind to sit still, and wait till your faculties became clearer."

Confuse her graceful figure and delicate features with those of the weather-beaten fisherman! Nothing could be more impossible; but Max had the good sense to keep his convictions to himself.

Producing knitting-pins and a huge ball of worsted, the widow began to work rapidly at one of the blue Jerseys the Cornishmen ordinarily wear, talking the while to the invalid with an equable manner and voice, comically at variance with the disturbed looks and short, agitated sentences of the invalid.

"Are you sure you are better, Mr. Haveryng?" she said, at last. "Are you quite certain that you can bear the presence of a visitor, because—"

She made a movement as if to rise, but Max, aroused by the dread of losing her, eagerly entreated her to keep her seat. He was almost well, he declared; it was only his broken leg that kept him a prisoner, and nothing would do him so much good as a little cheerful conversation.

She smiled slightly at his impetuosity; but neither that, nor the passionate admiration his looks betrayed, stirred her from her composure. Either this girl-widow was accustomed to such homage, or too indifferent to be more than amused by it.

"I will stay, then, she graciously made answer, "until you begin to feel tired; only I must warn you that I listen better than I talk; therefore you will not find me a very enlivening companion."

Max could have replied that he should be quite content to lie still and gaze at her; but her dignified, quiet repose, which he thought so lovely, forbade anything like flattery or impertinence. It is true that either the one or the other would have glanced off harmless, for she betrayed none of that consciousness of her own fascinations which frequently mars the beauty of the fairest; and Max, accustomed to the coquetries of the Spanish American belles, perceived in a moment that she was of a different order of beings to the Donnas Elvira and Clara of his native land.

She had warned him that he must make the conversation; but it was some time before he could do more than blurt out a trite hope that he had not been the cause of her absence from the cottage.

"Not entirely," was the frank reply. "I do not like strangers; nor should I be here now if I did not compassionate your dullness."

"But Dan must miss you dreadfully!" the young man hazarded.

"Why? Has he ever said anything to that effect? Uncle Dan might have told you that he is too busy to miss any one. Besides, I never have resided with him constantly."

"Then your home is in the neighborhood?" was the eager comment upon her words. "I guessed as much. I felt convinced that you were here frequently, though you have never approached me. But you will not avoid me any longer—I shall see you often, shall I not?"

She flashed at him a reproof for the curiosity his last words had betrayed.

"I shall not care to come at all if it be solely to hear myself catechised.

He apologized, and tried to explain.

"Pray forgive me if I have seemed too inquisitive. You must acknowledge that, under the circumstances, my questions were excusable, for how can I help wishing to know more of a person to whom I owe all the kindness I have received since my accident?"

But she would not accept the thanks he hastened to tender.

"Indeed, Mr. Haveryng, it is not to me you owe all this gratitude. It was Uncle Dan who brought you here, and who has neglected his fishing to nurse you."

"But it was you," he persisted, "who prevailed upon him to do this—who refused to hear of my being carried elsewhere. Can I ever forget how generously you pleaded in my behalf?"

A transient flush crossed her face, but she did not raise her eyes from her knitting.

"Do not praise me, for I was neither so generous nor sympathetic as you imagine, but merely excited by—by events to which your accident was the climax; and inclined to think my friends unfeeling, when, in reality, they were only prudent."

"Shall I lay myself open again to the charge of undue curiosity," said Max, rather resentfully, "if I inquire what imprudence there could be in sheltering an inoffensive and wounded stranger? Surely your friends did not imagine that I could ever be base enough to do or say anything that would injure you, or them?"

But the fiery question was evaded.

"Perhaps Uncle Dan was studying the interests of the community at large," said the young widow, demurely, her fingers moving faster than ever. "There was a gentleman staying at Jenifer Madron's last summer, who forgot to pay his bill before he left. Besides, our Cornish lassies are pretty and vain; and Uncle Dan may have concluded that handsome strangers, like Mr. Haveryng, are dangerous guests at St. Erne."

Max laughed and reddened.

"I have ceased to believe in my good looks, since Dan permitted me a peep at myself this morning in his shaving-glass. By no stretch of fancy can I imagine the gaunt, haggard Max Haveryng, who lies here, dangerous to the hearts of your mermaidens. By the by, they never appear to me. Where are they?"

"Just now, do you mean? On the little pier, barefooted, fetching coals from the Mary, of Newcastle, in baskets slung on their backs. But they will be smart enough o' Sundays, when they have donned their best gowns and bonnets."

"And till I can limp to the quay of which you speak, I suppose I must be content to wait for a glimpse of these charming lassies," said Max, trying to bring the conversation closer to themselves; "for Dan has so few visitors that I could fancy myself a prisoner rather than a guest."

He saw her start and bite her rosy lip, but went on still more boldly.

"Even you—his relative—have come and gone again and again without permitting me to see you."

"How do you know that?" she asked, abruptly, her cheeks no longer emulating the white rose, but its brighter rival.

"An adventurous life has sharpened my sense of hearing," was the smiling reply; "and lying here in my solitude, I have learned to distinguish your step from any other. You must not imagine that you can ever come here again without my knowing it."

The knitting was flung on the floor, and she started to her feet, half angry, half frightened.

"I will not come here at all if you set so close a watch upon me! Why have you done this?"

Alarmed at the consequence of his avowal, Max raised himself on his elbow, and implored her to resume her seat.

"I will not do anything to displease you—on my honor, I will not! I shall consider myself very unfortunate if a longing to see a friendly face occasionally, coupled with my regrets that you avoided me, have led me to say or do anything that annoys you!"

She stood for a few seconds, her eyes cast down, her features working as if she were communing with herself; then, returning to her seat, she picked up her work.

"I am not annoyed—*now*. I forgot that *you* are ill, and that invalids are privileged to have strange whims and fancies. No doubt you have mistaken for me old Leah Kurnow, who has often called here to bring some dainty of her own cooking for your supper. You are equally in error when you hint that Uncle Dan has kept his neighbors aloof since you have been here. They never do intrude upon him. There is not one of them who would venture to cross his threshold uninvited. They fear him too much."

Max looked surprised. What had the quiet, good-natured old Triton done to inspire such a feeling as this?

"Uncle Dan is the wise man of St. Erne," she gravely explained. "He sets broken bones, cures sprains and fevers, foretells storms, arbitrates disputes, and relieves ill-wished persons from the effects of the evil eye, with a skill that no one here has ever ventured to dispute."

Was she jesting? The stalwart Californian looked so unmistakably bewildered, that just such a merry laugh floated through the room as he remembered to have heard on the night of his accident.

"Have you no wise men in your own country, that you gaze at me so doubtfully?" she demanded. "I am not exaggerating Uncle Dan's powers, nor the faith of his neighbors. They would sooner trust him, when sickness or trouble overtake them, than call in a doctor or lawyer."

"Perhaps they know that he has a good fairy at his elbow?" suggested Max, rather saucily.

But she shook her head and made no answer.

"St. Erne must be a very primitive village," he said, after another pause. "I long to be able to see more of it and of its inhabitants."

"You will find the people as interesting as the scenery," she answered; "and it is out of the regular track, so that few tourists come here. Your best plan, as soon as you can bear removal, will be to hire a boat, and sail into Mount's Bay. At Newlyn, or Penzance, you will find excellent accommodation."

"Are you in a hurry to get rid of me, that you so readily arrange this plan for my departure?" the Californian bluntly asked.

"My good sir, you forget yourself! What can it signify to me whether you go or stay?" she queried, in her turn, with such a stately air, that Max first winced and then grew angry.

"What does it signify to you?" he repeated. "Why, nothing, of course. The kindest-hearted soon grow tired of compassionating a helpless man. Besides, you have your secrets, and you have no faith in my honor or my gratitude. You are in constant dread that I shall discover something you wish to hide from me, and make a bad use of my knowledge."

Once again he had startled her out of her equanimity, and she glanced fearfully around.

"How do you know this, Mr. Haveryng?" she exclaimed, in an agitated whisper. "Why do you say this?"

"How do I know it?"—and in his excitement he raised himself into a sitting posture. "Have I not been learning it daily ever since I have been here? and do you think that I would have stayed where I am suspected of such treachery, if my poor limbs would have carried me away? Why have you hid from me so carefully, and why has Dan equivocated with me, but because you think I am some poor pitiful scoundrel, who must be hoodwinked and kept at bay, or he will do you a mischief?"

He sunk back on his pillows, quite exhausted with his own vehemence; and, dropping her knitting, she hastened to his assistance. Without knowing it, he had dissipated the alarm his first passionate speech evoked, and she was once more cool, and even patronizing, in her demeanor. Compelling him to swallow a simple restorative that was among Daniel Calynack's nostrums, she bathed his face and hands with a fragrant water, distilled from the herbs in the garden, till he grew calm again, and very penitently expressed his contrition for the trouble he had given her.

"Why, what a petulant *boy* you are, after all!" she said, as she stood looking down upon him. "And so you are hurt and angry because dear old Dan does not admit you into his counsels when he makes up a syrup for a cough, or writes a charm for a sick cow?"

"I have not murmured at Dan. I can forgive him if he is as prejudiced and ignorant as he is good-natured; but you—yes, you—might have known me better!"

"Of course," was the half-laughing rejoinder. "I might have perceived that instead of being a grave, experienced, traveled man, you are a hot-headed, impulsive youth, in haste to quarrel with those who have sheltered you, because they have quietly gone on their own way, and neither contradicted nor encouraged you in your fancies. Really, Mr. Haveryng, you have been making yourself very ridiculous!"

"Laugh at me as much as you choose," he answered, rather sullenly; "but understand that you will not alter my opinions, *nor blind me to the truth!*"

Again, the flush of anger mounted to her fair forehead, and she said, with a stamp of her foot, "You shall not pry into my affairs!"

"I would not if I could," Max replied, with equal heat. "I do but tell you that you would have treated me more generously if you had said at first, 'We have our secrets—respect them.'"

"Would you have done so?" she queried, with a keen glance.

"Am I a serpent, that I should turn and sting the hands that saved me from death?" he retorted; and her looks grew softer as she listened to the ring of wounded feeling in his deep-toned voice.

"If we have done you any injustice, Mr. Haveryng, I am sorry for it. I will frankly tell you that we believed you to be a person whom we had some reason to fear. That we no longer think this, my being here must convince you."

"And from henceforth you will trust me?" he exclaimed.

But she drew back a step, and regarded him thoughtfully.

"What do you mean by trusting you? If we have secrets, as you imagine, we cannot reveal them to every casual acquaintance."

"Certainly not; but you can rely on my good feeling; and you can prove that you do so by coming and going freely, without harboring a fear that I shall ever see or comment upon anything your friends may wish to conceal."

"Agreed!" she said, a little mischief lurking in her eyes. "I will have reliance on you, and so, sir, I no longer hesitate to introduce myself as Mrs. Letitia Rayne, from Howth, the relict of Daniel Calynack's fourth cousin, now visiting St. Erne for change of air."

"But you are not—you cannot really be a widow!" Max commented, incredulously.

She pointed to her ring; yet still he was unconvinced.

"Ah, yes, I noticed that; but—but—"

"But Mr. Haveryng controls his curiosity, and keeps his promises admirably!" was the satirical retort. "He does not comment upon anything we say or do; he will never pry into what we wish to conceal; nor does he ask impertinent questions, or express doubts of our veracity!"

"I am wrong," he said, penitently; "but it is always so difficult to reconcile oneself to mystery or disguises."

"Have nothing to do with either," she promptly recommended. "Hire a boat, as I advised you, and leave us. You may be in danger here. Perhaps we are leagued with smugglers, or engaged in some conspiracy against the Government, or daily expecting to be taken up and sent to penal servitude for practicing sorcery; and you might be arrested as an accomplice. Better leave St. Erne while you can do so with safety."

"How absurd!" said Max, laughing in the midst of his vexation. "Is it not more likely that you are masquerading to amuse yourself at the expense of the blundering Californian before you?"

She drew herself up haughtily.

"You make yourself of too much consequence, Mr. Haveryng. Pray understand, at once, that no motive but the purest compassion for your sufferings has led me here!"

"I told you I was a blunderer, and I have proved it by making you angry with me," he exclaimed, with a rueful air. "Be merciful once again, and forgive my silly speeches!"

"I will do so on condition that you promise—" and then she paused, as if in doubt of his sincerity.

"I will promise anything—everything you demand!" he hastened to assure her; "only do not rob me of the solace of your visits!"

"Then you give me your word never to question me—never to seek to know anything I think proper to withhold—and never to doubt that I am Letty Rayne, Uncle Dan's widowed relative?"

Max understood all the question conveyed. He must be content to know her in a character and garb that he felt convinced were assumed, or not at all. Although too frank to conceal that this disguise annoyed him, his answer was as unaffectedly earnest as it was concise.

"It would grieve me more than I can confess if I were denied the hope of seeing you again."

Another gesture of displeasure warned him that he spoke too warmly.

"Please to word that speech differently, Mr. Haveryng. What you term *grief* can only be the peevish dissatisfaction of an invalid, who does not care to be disappointed. If you were to say, 'I shall be glad if Mrs. Rayne will come and wile away an hour by talk-

ing or reading to me,' I should feel much more inclined to oblige you."

Another palpable hint that Max must not attempt flatteries or lover-like attentions; but, eager to see her under any restrictions, he obediently repeated the formula.

"Then I will try to come to-morrow;" and as she spoke, she laid a couple of books on the bed, and bade him farewell. But ere she could prevent it, Max had imprisoned her hand—not the one that wore the odious ring—and kissed it.

For a moment she stood looking down upon the fingers his lips had touched, as if the audacity of the act had stupefied her; then, with her face gaining additional beauty from the soft blush that stole over it, she snatched up her wrapper, and quitted the cottage.

As soon as her slim form was no longer visible, Max seized one of the books she had left, and examined the title-page, in the hope that it bore the name of the owner. But no; the volumes were fresh from the shop of a Penzance bookseller, with the leaves uncut; and once more he was so completely baffled, that he lay back and closed his eyes, breathing a sigh of mortification.

The sound caught the ear of old Dan, who had just entered the room, bringing with him the briny smell of the ocean; and he drew near the bed, and rather anxiously felt the hightened pulse of his patient.

"How is it with ye, my son? How are ye feeling?"

"Mystified!" said Max, curtly.

"Is that another name for the headache?" asked the fisherman. "I maunt leave ye so long again, if I'm to find ye all the worse for the change of nurses."

"Nay, nonsense; I'm much better for it, much better!" cried the invalid, catching hold of him as he was moving away. "But, Dan, tell me—that is, if you can without breaking confidence—"

He stopped suddenly. What question could he ask about the mysterious widow without breaking the pledge he had given her?

Dan waited with great patience, till satisfied that Max did not intend to pursue his inquiries; then, with quaint gravity he made reply: "I'll tell ye one thing, lad, and that is, that the sooner ye get away from here, the better 'twill be for you and all of us."

"But why, Dan—why do you say this?" he was asked, with an urgency that would bear no refusal.

"Oh, because, when I see a chance of doubtful weather, I warns my neighbors that there's storms ahead, and so gives them the chance of escaping 'em."

"Speak more plainly. Is it for me you fear, or for Mrs.—"—the hateful name would not be spoken—"or the young lady you call your niece?"

"For she!"—and Dan's strong hands were suddenly clenched, and the veins in his forehead began to swell. "Do you think I'd let any hurt come to her under my roof? It was for yourself I spoke, lad—for yourself. I'd be main sorry to see ye come to any trouble."

And away he went, leaving Max—to use his own expression—more hopelessly mystified than ever.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH A CHARGE IS BROUGHT AGAINST MAX, AND THE NET DRAWN ROUND HIM.

The fisherman's counsels, in spite of the unpleasant impression they made at the time, were wholly forgotten when the beautiful unknown paid Max another visit. By common consent all doubtful subjects were avoided, and the Californian was careful to talk only of the wildly beautiful country he had just quitted.

He could not have chosen a more fascinating topic. While he described the scenery of California and the adjoining States, or recalled hunting adventures or hair-breadth escapes from the savage jaguar, or the wily and treacherous Indian, she sat like one entranced. The conversation rarely flagged, for she never seemed to weary of listening, and who would not willingly play *Othello* to such a *Desdemona?*

Insensibly she took a more friendly tone with the gratified Max, who was careful not to disturb these pleasant relations by undue curiosity. She could not be insensible to the good qualities of one who was always respectful in his demeanor; and if she still treated him *en princesse*, it was more because the manner was natural to her than from any desire to hold him aloof.

That she was accustomed to command who could doubt, for was not old Dan her willing slave, and one who evidently felt himself repaid by the caressing touch of her hand on his shoulder, or the smile with which she greeted his approach?

And so time sped on, and Max knew no more about Mrs. Letitia Rayne than she had thought proper to tell him; but that she was no poorly-born fisherman's daughter he could have sworn, despite that simplicity of attire, which she never varied. Never, since the days of mediæval romance, had a more perplexing piece of femininity existed than Mistress Letty; so shrewd in some matters, so childlike and ignorant in others. She spoke French fluently, and could draw tolerably well, yet she admitted on one occasion that she had never received any regular teaching at home or abroad. It often surprised Max to find how much, and yet how little, she knew. All her knowledge had been gathered from books. She had read many, and possessed a retentive memory; yet, just as she had astonished her hearer by a display of profound erudition, she would put to him some question concerning everyday life, which proved that she had no more acquaintance with the world that lay beyond the Cornish fishing village than her studies had given her.

He could not resist telling her so one day when she had been asking for a description of London, and he had failed to make her comprehend the magnitude and bustle of the great city.

Much to his vexation, she immediately gathered up her work and flitted away.

"Why did you leave me so suddenly?" he demanded the next time she came. "You ought to know me well enough now to know that I had no intention of offending you!"

"I was not offended," said the widow, blandly; "but your conversation ceases to be interesting when it turns upon my own ignorance."

"I will be more careful for the future," she was assured.

"Pray do, for I have promised to discontinue these visits as soon you show symptoms of forgetting our agreement."

Max pondered over this speech long after she had left him. By whom had this promise been extorted? By the woman Esther, who had so vehemently opposed his remaining at the cottage? And where was this unseen guardian of the beautiful Letty? During the visits of the latter to the invalid, old Dan was always within hearing, whether mending his nets or drying herbs for his infallible medicines; and not unfrequently he testified as much interest in the narratives of Max as his fairer auditor; but the female whose voice he had heard on the night of his accident never appeared, nor was her name spoken in his hearing. And yet Max felt pretty sure that she was at no great distance, and that it was a signal from her that sometimes caused Mistress Letty to start up and hurry away, with that curious look, half anger and half terror, in her eyes that he had seen there on their first meeting.

While sometimes striving to get a clew to the mystery surrounding her, but more frequently forgetting all else in the charm of intercourse with one so lovely, Max was gradually regaining health and strength. With the help of Dan he contrived to limp first to a rude settee by the window, and presently, as the weather grew warmer, to a sheltered nook in the garden, from which he could view the beach and watch the tide come beating in against the huge bowlders, with which the shore was bestrewn.

Here, too, he made acquaintance with Dan's mates, and learned with surprise what a shrewd, thoughtful race of men are these Cornish fishers of the deep. Their wives and children would also pause to drop a curtsey and exchange a "how dy'e do?" with the frank, pleasant gentleman, whose terrible fall from the cliffs they were never tired of dilating upon; and many a simple homely delicacy was brought and pressed upon Dan for the table of his guest.

Max had long gossips with the fishermen, not only about the perils of the sea, but the village, its inhabitants, and the neighboring gentry. Here, as elsewhere, Squire Penruan was never named without such an ominous shake of the head, that he felt in no great haste to proclaim his kinship. The doctor was discussed and the clergyman ditto, till Max was tolerably well versed in all the affairs of the locality, but of the widow or her home heard he never a word; and he was too honorable to put to strangers the questions he was longing to ask.

Could she really be what she had represented herself, and nothing more? and, if so, why did she never join Max in the garden, but seclude herself from all observers? It was not because her bereavement preyed on her spirits, for her musical laugh was heard more and more frequently as her intimacy with Max Haveryng progressed; and the riddle was as far from solution when he discarded his crutch as it had been when he first beheld her.

"I wish you would teach me to knit," he said, jestingly, one day, when she sat with him in the deep porch of the cottage. "Such work as that is too coarse for your little fingers, and I get so tired of seeing you eternally bending over it."

"I am afraid you would be such an inapt pupil," was the smiling retort, "that the stitches would soon be wrought into a tangle and Uncle Dan disappointed of his new garment."

"Is it for Dan? Nay, give it to me to carry with me to Aquas Dolces, and keep in remembrance of the Lily of St. Erne!"

"Is that poetical name meant for me, or does it solely apply to my cap? No, no, Mr. Haveryng," she added more seriously; "you will not require such a cumbrous reminiscence of your stay in Cornwall. Uncle Dan prophesies that you will carry a scar just above your temple for the remainder of your days; will not that suffice for a memento of the tall cliffs?"

"I begin to think that I shall carry away with me a wound in my heart as well as my head!" said Max, so gravely, that the widow looked up, and meeting his eye, blushed a little, and began winding up the ball of worsted that had fallen from her lap, as if meditating another flight.

He put out his hand to prevent her departure.

"Do not go. Why should you be displeased to hear me acknowledge that it will grieve me very much to leave you? We have spent so many pleasant hours together!"

"Not pleasanter than you will spend with the Donna Elvira of whom you raved so often when you were feverish!" he was reminded.

"Did I speak of my little cousin Elvira when I was delirious? queried Max, not a whit abashed. "If ever you come to Aquas Dolces, and I have the pleasure of introducing you to my maternal relatives, you will understand why I have found it easy to forget all other faces since I have seen yours!"

The unknown rose, and would not be detained any longer.

"I *must* be going. I have staid too long; and, Mr. Haveryng, in case we do not meet again, you have my best wishes for your speedy and safe return to your home and friends."

In spite of his lameness, Max rose, and limped after her, as, with stately air, she moved away and reentered the cottage.

"Do not speak as if my too hasty avowal had driven you from me! Surely, we may be friends, if you will not permit me to hope—"

She would not let him finish his sentence.

"Don't romance, Mr. Haveryng; and don't connect any hopes with my civilities to you! In a few days, at furthest, you will leave Cornwall, and we are not likely to meet again; so we will part as acquaintances, who have liked each other well enough, and—that is all!"

"To you it may be," he answered, earnestly; "but I cannot so easily forget the feelings you have inspired."

"*Arretez!*" she exclaimed. "I will not listen to what you Americaus call tall talk! It means nothing—nothing at all!"

"Then you think I profess what I do not feel?" the invalid exclaimed. "You believe I am insensible to the beauty, to the goodness—"

But here Miss Letty covered her ears with her hands, and would hear no more.

"Pray be silent! I must not, I dare not listen! If you say these things merely to flatter me, it is folly; if you have any deeper feeling, it is madness! I like you very well, Mr. Haveryng. You are good-natured, and have told me many things I wished to know; but—I hope you will never come back to St. Erne, and that you will forget me as quickly as you can!"

"Set me an easier task if you really wish me to obey you!" was the sorrowful reply.

"When do you propose leaving England?" she queried, refusing to take notice of his last words.

"I do not know. I have not thought of it. I shall most probably remain in this neighborhood for some time to come. I shall go from here to Penruan Abbey."

Mistress Letty's blue eyes dilated.

"It is not a show-house. The Squire has an aversion to artists and tourists, and never admits strangers within his domains, if he can help it. Why should you go there?"

"Is he equally churlish to his relatives?—because I have the—doubtful—honor of being connected with him."

The widow recoiled, and the crimson tint of her lips paled strangely.

"*You*, Mr. Haveryng! *You* related to Mr. Penruan! Then you have been basely deceiving us! Dan! Uncle Dan! come, oh, come to me! What have we done? We have fostered a reptile, who has crept into our confidence, to ruin us!"

Petrified by the wild outburst, Max neither moved nor spoke, till the old fisherman, aroused from a reverie by her voice, had hurried to her side, and with his arms folded about her was sternly surveying the supposed culprit.

"What have I done?" Max demanded at last. "It is true that I have not mentioned my reasons for coming to St. Erne."

But ere he could say more, Mistress Letty had disengaged herself from Dan's embrace, whispered something in his ear, flashed one glance of sorrowful reproach at the young man and disappeared.

He would have followed her, and insisted on being permitted to exculpate himself, but the fisherman stood in the way, and prevented it.

"Nay, my lad, nay! Seems ye have done mischief enough. I'll not have my poor little lassie troubled no more just yet."

"But do you not see that I want to explain?" cried Max, struggling with him despite his lameness; "to make her understand that she is mistaken if she believed that I would do anything dishonorable? Why should my kinship with Penruan make me a villain? I have never seen him. I do but seek him because he and my father were friends in their youth. Call her back! Let me assure her by everything I hold dear or sacred that I am not what she termed me!"

But Dan was impenetrable, and Max could not move him in the least, either by entreaties or threats.

"I don't wish to think any harm of 'ee, my lad; nay, not I; but there's no trusting no one; and so we mun let it go."

"And you persist in suspecting me in spite of what I tell you?"

"Nay, then, nay, I'd rather think well of 'ee, my son; but we mun let it go."

"Let what go?" cried the incensed Max. "Do you mean that I must be content to let your niece believe that all the while I have been here, fed, nursed, and treated with unvarying kindness, I have been harboring some treacherous intention? Why does she fear this Squire Penruan?"

"I never said she feared him," was the cautious reply.

"What, then, should make her fly from me, and distrust me, when she learns that I am related to this man?"

"I am bad at answering too many questions," said Dan; "and, after all, what do it sinnify, lad? If ye're true-hearted, why ye *are;* and if ye ain't, why ye *ain't;* and ye may look out for squalls if I catches ye at any mischief. I'm old, but I'm strong in the arms, and can throw my man a good fall even now!"

Max burst into a laugh, in spite of his vexation.

"I shall begin to think I am stark staring mad if this goes on much longer. Why the deuce don't you tell me what I am suspected of doing or saying?"

"Eh, but, lad, if ye have done it, what's the use? And if ye have not, why then there's the more reason for we to hold our tongues."

"Pshaw! whoever heard such reasoning as this? Answer me but one question candidly, and I will be satisfied. What makes your niece dread or dislike Mr. Penruan?"

Dan scratched his head.

"Truth is, lad, if I mun speak, and I'm loath, too, to say anything that might get me into trouble—"

"You have nothing to fear from me," he was earnestly assured. "I swear not to repeat aught you tell me!"

"Well then, lad, I'll own that I never knew e'er a body yet that didn't dislike the Squire more or less."

"But Mistress Letty—it is of her I spoke—has he been dastard enough to do her any injury?"

"He's a man as allays keeps the right side of the law—allays:" said Dan, evasively.

"Why don't you say at once that you're determined to keep me in ignorance?" stormed Max, losing his temper entirely. "One word, and I have done. Will you let me see your niece, as you call her, and convince her of my truth—yes or no?"

"Nay, but I can't if I would, for she've gone, and she'll not come here no more till you've left."

"But she cannot be far off, and I will not rest till I find her!"

"Think twice o' that, my lad," said Dan, significantly. "I mought send ye off on a wild goose chase somewhere; and if I don't, it's because I can't help thinking ye're sound at the core, after all. Ye see, it's hard to doubt the lad that ye've watched by so many nights and prayed for, when he wer' past praying for hisself!"

"And I am honest and true, my dear old friend!" cried Max, wringing the fisherman's hand. "I'll prove it by being guided by you in everything. Only tell me what you wish me to do, and I'll do it!"

"Will ye now? That's good. Then take a berth in the Sifiide" (Sylphide)—"she's lying off the quay at this moment—and go right off to London, and luck be with ye!"

But Max began to retract.

"Leave Cornwall, and see Mistress Letty no more? Go away without one kind farewell, or the chance of exonerating myself? Impossible, Dan; I cannot quit

St. Erne till I have been to Penruan. What would the Squire himself think if he ever learns that I have been in the neighborhood all the weeks of his absence, and then skulked off as soon as he returned home? It would look as if I were really the scamp I have been called!"

"Ha' your way, lad—ha' your way," said Dan, crustily; "and don't hinder me no longer, for I ha' the drink to make for Marg'ry Gwennap's sick child, and she'll be here afore it's ready!"

"I'll write to her—to Mistress Letty," concluded Max, still detaining the old man. "You will not refuse to deliver my letter?"

"Stick it up behind the almanac, lad, and she shall have it, if ever she comes here again!"

"But you speak as if months may elapse before this happens! Come, Dan, be generous, and promise that my letter shall be forwarded at once?"

"Stick it up, and I'll think it over. I wun't say no more nor that, if ye bodgers me all day!"

Still, this was a concession; and Max, on the only scrap of paper he could find in the cottage, poured out his heart to the mysterious widow. He was far from satisfied with his composition when it was finished; but as it was impossible to make a fairer copy, without waiting until a messenger could be found and dispatched to the village shop, he was forced to let it go, and hope that his fervent assurances of his honorable conduct would carry conviction to the reader.

It was some comfort to find that his epistle soon disappeared from the place where Dan bade him leave it, and that he might fairly conclude it was on its way to Mistress Letty. But no answer reached him, and very unwillingly he prepared to quit the cottage, where he could not but see that he was no longer welcome.

"But don't think you are altogether rid of me!" he said to the old fisherman, as he was bidding him farewell. "As long as I remain at Penruan Abbey, I shall come frequently to St. Erne; and you may tell your niece that nothing shall induce me to return to my own country till I have heard from her own lips that she acquits me of the charge—whatever it may be—that is brought against me!"

"I'll never remember all that, but I'll do my best," said Dan, who was diving into one of his capacious pockets. "Stop a minute, lad; there's something here I was to give ye afore ye went; so, if I haven't lost it, now's the time to let you have it—eh?"

For a long while, however, the fisherman's search seemed useless, and Max was in agony, though reproved for his excitement with a testy "What's the need o' such a fussing? 'Tis only a bit o' stone when 'tis found, that's not worth a groat to e'er o' us."

But just as the Californian despaired of receiving this parting gift, Dan gave an exulting whistle, and held toward him a horny palm, in which lay an unset cameo—a youthful head of the God of Silence, with one finger firmly pressed on the closed mouth.

Was this emblematical of Letty herself, or a warning to Max to be cautious how he named her at the Abbey? He knew not; but slipping into Dan's hand notes to an amount that would fairly reimburse the kind old man for all his trouble, he slowly climbed the cliff-path, and turned his face toward Penruan, where he did not despair of finding a key to all that was now tormenting him.

Dan Calynack watched him as long as he was in sight, and then, ruefully shaking his head, went back to his village. Did he divine what his departing guest never suspected—that the perplexities of the present were but the forerunners of something darker and deeper—the first meshes of a net, from which it would not be easy to extricate the unwary foot of Max Haverying!

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MAX HAVERYNG MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF HIS KINSMAN.

When Max walked up the avenue leading to Penruan Abbey, he saw that smoke was curling up from some of the chimneys, while here and there a window was set open—sure tokens that the owner of the mansion had returned home at last. Squire Penruan's stay at Penzance had been prolonged from day to day and from week to week, in consequence of his inability to come to terms with the seller of some land he coveted. Over the few pounds in dispute he had haggled and argued, throwing up the bargain and returning to the charge again and again, until he had succeeded in buying at his own price. Yet, after all, he had come back to his own house in an evil humor, declaring that he had been shamefully overreached in the affair, and that the property was not worth the sum he had given for it.

The economical master of Penruan had long since converted the park into grazing land for horses and cattle, the fences coming close up to the carriage drive leading to the house. In one of these paddocks a young girl, in a linen riding-skirt, and broad-leaved hat, was engaged in such equestrian feats, that Max paused to look on; admiration of her courage mingling with alarm lest she should meet with some accident.

The horse on which she was mounted was a great coarse brute, evincing such signs of ill temper, that he was wholly unfit for feminine management. Sidling shying, then darting forward, and as suddenly stopping short, the vicious creature was evidently doing its best to throw its rider. More than once her danger was so imminent, that the excited Max was ready to spring forward to her assistance; but she contrived, somehow or other, to retain her seat, even when her steed dashed round and round the paddock at a mad gallop, as trying to the nerves of the beholder as it must have been to the strength of the lady.

From sheer exhaustion, the horse subsided presently into a quieter pace, and his rider had breathing-time. Then it was that, glancing round in search of the whip that had fallen from her hand during one of the struggles for the mastery Max had been witnessing, she espied the young man leaning over the low fence, and, after bestowing upon him a long, critical stare, beckoned him to approach.

As Max, not without difficulty and pain, was climbing the bars in obedience to her summons, he remembered, for the first time, that his tourist's suit was none the better for its Cornish experiences. It is true that Dan had repaired sundry rents it had received in his fall from the cliffs, but these darns were certainly not improvements to the smartly cut vestments with which Captain Renton's hint had induced him to provide himself. Sundry dents, also received in the fall, had given a disrespectful air to his hat, and the dust gathered in climbing the rude track from St. Erne was an additional disadvantage.

"I'm a pretty object for a lady's eye to light upon," he muttered, as he surveyed himself distastefully. "No doubt she takes me for one of the neighboring clowns;" and her first words confirmed the supposition.

"Come here, my good fellow, will you, and find my whip for me? It lies somewhere on the grass; but don't get too near my horse's heels, for he is as treacherous as he is ugly. Be quick, please."

After some searching, Max found the useless ivory-handled toy. But as he courteously doffed his hat while presenting it, and the searching dark orbs of the young lady took in every detail of his face and figure, her manner became a trifle less imperious.

"Thanks! I might have spoken to you more civilly, but, at the first glance, I set you down for a tramp. It was a silly mistake!" she added, hastily, as she saw him bite his lip. "Are you one of the Penruan tenants? And what is your name?"

"Haveryng!"

"Haveryng!" she repeated. "It sounds familiar, and yet I do not know you; and I thought I knew every one on or near the estate. Where do you live?"

But Max was too much engaged inspecting her horse to reply more fully to these sharply-put queries. He walked round the animal, with upraised eyebrows and compressed lips, and finally gave his head such a grave shake, that, tapping her saddle impatiently with her whip, the young lady exclaimed: "Well, sir, do you intend to favor me with the result of your investigations?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; but I have nothing more to tell you than might have been learned from any one who has the smallest acquaintance with horseflesh. This brute will never be worth the trouble of training."

"I admit that he is ugly," said the lady.

"And ill-tempered!" added Max.

"*Cela va sans dire!*" she retorted. "The one and the other are synonymous. A good-humored person cannot be ugly, and so you condemn my poor steed *in toto*."

"He never will be fit for a lady either to ride or drive. It is tempting Providence to put yourself at the mercy of such a vicious beast!"

"He is vicious, but he may—nay, he *shall*—be broken of his tricks! Do you not see that I have come off with flying colors from the contest we have just had?"

"No!" said Max, bluntly; "for I am tolerably sure that the animal is getting ready for another trial of strength, and that he will have the best of it eventually."

"The grass is soft, and I fall lightly," said the young lady, with great philosophy; "and more than that, I have a vast amount of perseverance. If Ursa Minor throws me to-day, I'll mount him again as soon as I have got over my bruises. He will have to give in!"

"Unless he contrives to break your neck first!" said Max, provoked at her obstinacy. "I wish you would be persuaded to dismount. You really are risking your life—you are, indeed!" he added, so earnestly that she left off flicking the flies that buzzed round her steed's ears, and turned in her saddle to look at him.

"May I ask where you gained *your* knowledge of horseflesh? You speak like an authority; your only excuse," she added, in lower tones, not meant for his ear, "for interfering in what does not concern you."

"I learned what little I know on the pampas of South America, whither I have often gone with the Guachos, who make it their business to capture the wild horses that herd there. I have shared with these men the delight of taming some fiery creature, till it would come at my call, and bend its proud neck to invite my caress. But that brute is not to be named with such horses as I allude to."

As he spoke, the amiable Ursa Minor, with a jerk at the reins, began backing and kicking more violent than before.

Max longed to interfere, but the lady's imperious "Keep back, sir!" was so decided, that he was slowly walking toward the fence, when the horse shot past him, to play the same tricks at the other side of the field, where he succeeded in ridding himself of his rider.

Max could feel his heart beat fast when he first caught sight of the empty saddle and the prostrate form that lay upon the sward. As quickly as his lameness permitted he hastened to the spot, but, ere he reached it, the young lady had raised herself, first to a sitting position, and then to her feet.

"I am not hurt," she said, reassuringly, as she met the anxious looks of the convalescent. "I slid off when I found that I must be unseated."

"You look pale," said Max. "Will you allow me to give you my arm to the house?"

She drew herself up, as if amazed at the audacity of such a proposal.

"I'm quite capable of walking," she answered, coldly. "If you have business with Mr. Penruan, I should advise you not to loiter here, for he is going out presently."

"As my visit is one of pleasure rather than business," answered Max, secretly amused at her offended air, "I do not feel at all inclined to hurry myself. You honored me a few minutes ago by inquiring my name; may I be permitted to put a similar inquiry to you?"

"I suppose so," said the lady, gathering up her skirt, and walking away. "There is no law in this land to punish those who ask impertinent questions. Yonder lies your way to the house. If you ring the servants' bell, some one will come to take your message to the Squire."

Max bowed, and reclimbing the fence, took the path she had indicated. If this fiery little creature was Eleanor Penruan, report had not exaggerated her charms. She was not fair; her complexion had none of the exquisite red and white that chased each other on the cheeks of Mistress Letty; neither was she a brunette, like the Spanish donnas of his native clime. But she reminded Max of some brilliant flower or tropical bird, so vivid was her coloring, so deeply crimson the tints that glowed upon her cheeks and lips. He had some faint conception that her features were irregular, and her mouth too large for beauty; but those who gazed at Eleanor Penruan forgot to criticise as soon as they came under the spell of her arch smiles and bewildering eyes.

Max had barely reached the front of the house, when the young lady, who had availed herself of a shorter cut, stood before him, her face flushed with haste.

"I have just remembered that you must be a stranger, and that it is ungenerous to let you go any further without a warning. If you have any boon to ask of Mr. Penruan, defer it for a day or two; he is not in the best of moods for granting favors to-day."

She disappeared before he could reply, and the only consequence of her warning was that, with frowning brows, Max rung such a peal on the visitors' bell, that the clang was heard all over the house.

The servant who opened the door bowed low to the guest, as he stepped boldly in and demanded to be shown to Mr. Penruan. Who was this Cornish squire, that every one must cringe to him, and seek or avoid him, according to the humor he was in? All the hot blood of the Californian was in tumult at the hint that had been given him; and for the sake of the family honor, he was eager to prove his father's relative less churlish than rumor implied.

He was not kept waiting long, and certainly Mr. Penruan's appearance was in his favor. Almost as tall as Max himself, though thin and spare as if with constant anxieties, his features, when lit up with a smile, were really handsome. He came forward, prepared to do the honors to the "gentleman," whom the servant informed him was waiting; but when his eye fell upon the dusty suit of Max, the whole expression of his face altered. His lips closed so resolutely that his mouth looked hard and cruel; his brows contracted and twitched oddly; and he stood with one hand on his vest like the first Napoleon, while with the other he stroked his long Dundreary whiskers, heavily streaked with gray, prepared to refuse any request that might be proffered to him.

Unadaunted by his discouraging manner, Max took a step forward, and unhesitatingly introduced himself.

"Mr. Penruan, I believe? Then we are relatives. I am the only son of Edward Haveryng, who left his native country some thirty years ago, and settled in California. My desire to behold my father's birthplace brought me to this neighborhood, and I did not care to leave it without seeing the gentleman so frequently mentioned in his diary as one of his intimate friends."

The Squire's brow clouded, and instead of noticing the hand Max extended, he answered sharply enough, "I have heard of you. I am told that some weeks since, you took advantage of my absence to come wandering about the Abbey, questioning my servants, and prying into my affairs."

Max reddened with indignation.

"Asking questions I may have been, for I have been anxious to make the acquaintance of any person or persons who knew my father in his boyhood; but when you accuse me of prying into your affairs or tampering with your servants, you go out of your way, Mr. Penruan, to insult me."

The Squire hastily laid his hand on the bell-rope.

"Do you want to fasten a quarrel upon me, young man? Because, at the first appearance of violence, I shall summon my servants and have you conveyed to the nearest jail!"

Max Haveryng smiled scornfully at his absurd fears.

"Don't alarm yourself, sir. I came here hoping that, for the sake of my dead father, you would give me a welcome. As you are not inclined to do so, it is only for your own sake I shall regret it."

"Where do you come from?" asked the Squire, abruptly.

"This morning do you mean? From the village on the beach, where I have been lying for some weeks at a fisherman's cottage, having broken my leg in a fall from the cliffs the night I arrived at Penruan. My home is in California."

"Why, if you were doing pretty well, did you leave that country?" demanded Mr. Penruan, testily, with an ugly contraction of his brows. "It is no use coming to me for assistance. I am not a public man. I have no interest with Government, and what is more, I cannot have poor relations lounging about my house, living on me."

"Why do you give me this information, Mr. Penruan?" demanded Max, haughtily. "Would it not have been as well to wait until you learned whether I came to you as a beggar?"

"How do I know that you are not an impostor?" retorted Penruan, wincing beneath the contemptuous look that Max bestowed upon him.

"If you have me watched off your premises, so that I cannot carry away your silver spoons, what will it signify to you whether I am or not?"

The two men stood glaring at each other for a few seconds; the Squire half-ashamed of his churlishness, and Max wroth at the treatment he was receiving.

"If you are *really* the son of Edward Haveryng, and will let me know at what inn you purpose staying, I shall be happy to do you any little service that lies in my power," Mr. Penruan said, at last.

"*If* I am the son of your kinsman!" Max replied. "I am not accustomed to hear my word doubted; and I'll tell you the only way in which I will take the trouble to prove my identity. Come to Aquas Dolces, the home my father's perseverance and industry secured to me, and I'll show you his portrait! Ay, and I'll put in practice for your benefit some of the good old Cornish customs he taught me. One of those, Mr. Penruan, is good-will to the stranger!"

Bowing slightly, and turning on his heel, Max left the room, crossed the wide hall, and, letting himself out, began leisurely retracing his steps along the avenue.

"That pretty Amazon was right," he said to himself, smiling in spite of his vexation. "It would have been wiser to defer my visit. Yet why? I have paid it, and satisfied myself that this John Penruan is just the same unsociable fellow my father described him. By the by, I wonder whether a recollection of the several memorandums in my father's pocket-book of sums lent to this amiable cousin of his made him so eager to be rid of me!

He might be afraid that I came to recall them to his memory."

A hasty step behind him made the young man glance over his shoulder. A servant from the house had followed him, to say that the Squire desired him to return.

Max shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Tell your master from me that our intercourse was not so pleasant as to give me any desire to resume it."

"The Squire will be awful angry if ye don't come back, sir!" said the man, so nervously, that Max burst into a laugh, and tossed him a shilling.

"Get yourself a cordial, my lad, to give you some courage. As for me, I can bear the thought of Mr. Penruan's displeasure. If he wants me, he'll find me at Mrs. Madron's, at St. Erne, for that is where I propose taking up my quarters for the present."

But before Max could turn away, the Squire himself made his appearance. He had been watching the conference from the door, and had comprehended that the young man did not intend to return. He had, therefore, come to urge his request in person, and, in compliance with his deprecating gesture, Max stood still in the pathway till Mr. Penruan came up.

There was still the same unpleasant contraction of the brows that gave such an ominous glare to his deeply-set eyes; but there was once more a smile upon his lips, and he began to apologize for his conduct in terms before which the annoyance of the easily appeased Max melted away.

"I am quite ashamed when I remember how rudely I have behaved to you, Mr. Haveryng. The fact is, I have just been very much worried over some business matters, and my memory is so bad that your father's name had quite escaped me. And so Edward Haveryng is dead, and you are his only son? He must have been very proud of you!"

"He was very fond of me," said Max, sighing a little. To his surprise, the sigh was echoed.

"I don't doubt it. To have an heir of one's own—ah! I have been denied that blessing, and it has grieved me very much. But it is no use dwelling on these things. Come, Mr. Haveryng, you must let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my wife."

Max looked doubtfully at his clothes.

"Pooh!" said the Squire; "we are too far from the metropolis here to be so precise, and you can send to Penzance for anything you want. I shall insist that you make the Abbey your quarters as long as you stay in Cornwall."

"If you really wish it," said the young man, not able to reconcile these civilities with the rudeness and distrust he had just encountered.

"Of course I wish it. Now that you have convinced me that you are the son of my old friend"—("How have I done so?" queried Max, mentally)—"I cannot think of letting you leave us. Come, come; I am quite impatient to take you to Mrs. Penruan. She is an invalid, but she always exerts herself to receive my friends, and she will be delighted to question you about California."

And so—will he, nill he—the Squire slipped his arm through that of Max, and led him back in triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

FIRST HOURS AT PENRUAN ABBEY.

LUNCHEON was spread on a table drawn into one of the broad bay windows of the handsome drawing-room to which Mr. Penruan ushered his guest. The furniture of the apartment was not only faded and old-fashioned, but so worn and thread-bare with constant use as to be fitter for the lumber-closet than the salon of a wealthy gentleman. The only modern articles visible were a pretty little cottage piano and an invalid's couch of Parisian make, fitted with every appliance for ease that the skill of the present day can devise. Still, few would have paused to note these discrepancies, for immediately on entering the room the eye was entranced by the glorious view the windows commanded. In one direction, far and wide spread the Atlantic, bounded solely by the horizon; in the other, the noble curves of Mount's Bay, with St. Michael's Mount in the foreground, and, far away in the blue distance, the bold bluffs of the Lizard.

At first, that intense admiration for Nature, which had grown upon Max Haveryng with his growth, made him overlook the fact that the room was not untenanted. The young lady he had seen in the paddock had exchanged her skirt for a morning dress, and was sitting at the table, whiling away the time with a novel till Mr. Penruan appeared. It was not till the Squire pronounced her name that she looked up, and then her glance of comical surprise at his companion was amusing.

"Nelly, I have brought you a visitor. This is Mr. Haveryng, a cousin of mine, from America. You must help me to make his stay at the Abbey a pleasant one. Mr. Haveryng, my daughter, Miss Eleanor Penruan!"

As she was demurely acknowledging the stranger's bow, the Squire glanced toward the couch, and abruptly asked, "Where is your mother? Is she not so well?"

"Fan-fan has undergone another operation," was the grave reply; "and though the dear creature bore it with great fortitude, mamma feels that her own nerves have been so severely tried, that she must not attempt any exertion for an hour or two."

"Is she hysterical?"

"I don't know, sir. I was too hungry to stay and inquire. I have repeated my message word for word, and, this time, without any little additions of my own."

Mr. Penruan frowned, coughed, commenced cutting the *pate* before him; recommended to Max some of the thin, sour, light wine, that was the only beverage placed on the table; and at last, rising abruptly, excused himself on the plea of anxiety on his lady's account, and left the room.

"I hope Mrs. Penruan is not seriously indisposed," said Max, to the young lady, who was placidly eating her lunch with an excellent appetite.

"Oh, no! Don't make yourself uncomfortable. If mamma were really ill, I should be too anxious to stay here. If I may advise you, Mr. Haveryng, you will cultivate a taste for water-drinking, for Mr. Penruan's wine has but one point in its favor—it's extremely cheap."

"Thanks for the advice," said Max, filling his glass from a caraffe of the *aqua pura* before him, and using the opportunity to steal a glance at his beautiful *vis-a-vis*. She detected it, however, and smiled so saucily, that he was somewhat disconcerted.

"Why did you not tell me who you were when we met this morning?" she demanded. "Was it in order to have me at a disadvantage, Mr. Haveryng?"

"Certainly not, Miss Penruan. You forget that it would not have been very complimentary to say 'I am your cousin,' just as you had mistaken me for a vagrant."

"But you are not my cousin, sir; and it is high time that I introduced myself to you under my right name. I am Eleanor Haydon; and Mr. Penruan, although he persists in having me regarded as his own child, is only my step-father."

"What, then, am I to call you?"

"If you wish to please *me*, give me my real appellation; if you prefer flattering the Squire's whims, you will know how to do it."

"Isn't this placing me in rather an awkward position?" asked Haveryng. "My friends call me simply Max; if you would agree to do the same, I could extricate myself from my difficulties by saying Cousin Eleanor."

The young lady looked up at him sharply, as if she suspected an impertinence in the proposal, but her scrutiny was met with such an unembarrassed mien, that she said curtly, "Well, I don't mind; anything is preferable to hearing that hateful Miss Penruan dinned into my ears continually. And now, I suppose, I ought to apologize for giving you a warning that appears to have been wholly unnecessary. I did not know that you were so sure of a welcome."

"Indeed, I appreciated your kind intentions," he answered, earnestly; "and the welcome of which you speak was such a tardy one, that it was only Mr. Penruan's evident regret for his rudeness that induced me to remain."

"You surprise me!" said Eleanor. "May I ask what induced the squire to—to—"

"Treat me so coldly?" demanded Max, finding that she hesitated for a word. "He did but follow suit. His step-daughter took me for a tramp, and he for an impostor."

"I am really very sorry you should have met with such a reception!" cried Eleanor, who detected the wounded feeling with which he spoke; "but I must ask again why you gave us the opportunity to be so uncivil?"

"In the country I come from," was the proud retort, "we do not require from the stranger who craves our hospitality a full and particular account of his ancestors before we permit him to come under our roof, or eat our bread."

"My dear Mr. Haveryng, the land of which you speak must be in a very uncivilized condition!" Eleanor demurely retorted; "and though such indiscriminate hospitality sounds very romantic, you must not expect to make a convert of Mr. Penruan. He prefers sober reality, and keeping the key of his larder in his own pocket."

"I had no desire to force myself upon him," said Max, still bitter and indignant.

"Of course you had not; and I am still at a loss to understand by what spell you have tamed the dragon."

"I am Mr. Penruan's kinsman—the son of an old friend to whom, in times past, he has lain under obligations. Is not this reason sufficient why he should invite me to be his guest while I remain in the neighborhood?"

"No, no, no!" cried the young lady, vehemently. "You have named the very last motive that would influence Squire Penruan. You'll say I'm very fond of offering my advice, but I cannot resist giving you a little more—keep your eyes open while you stay at the Abbey, Mr. Haveryng!"

"I don't think the warning will be of much use, unless you kindly explain why it is given."

"But, flushing a little, she hastily replied, "I cannot do that! I have said too much already; but you are a stranger, and I could not resist—"

She broke off in some confusion, and rushed into another subject.

"We must contrive to mount you, Mr. Haveryng, if you will promise not to look too contemptuously on our sorry nags, and then you can be my cavalier when I ride Ursa Minor."

"I trust I shall never see you on the back of that vicious beast again!" cried Max. "Let me train some other horse for you while I am staying here. I shall be delighted with the task."

"Thanks; but there is a pretty little chestnut mare I ride when I am in a good-humor, or venture into those parts of the neighborhood where one must behave decorously. For the park, and for peace of mind, commend me to Ursa Minor."

"Is not this an extraordinary caprice for a young lady to indulge in?" asked Max, very gravely. "Can Mr. or Mrs. Penruan be aware of the risks you run?"

"Mr. Penruan wouldn't fret if I broke my neck tomorrow!" she answered, with a careless toss of her head; "and mamma is rather obtuse to things of the kind. If you were to give her—as you seem inclined to do—an agonizing description of the perils I encounter, you would send her into a fit of hysterics, so violent that, by the time she recovered, she would have forgotten what occasioned them."

The beautiful Eleanor's manner of alluding to her invalid mother grated upon the nerves of Max, and his looks betrayed what he thought; for, with an impatient movement, she exclaimed, "Oh, yes, Mr. Haveryng, it's very shocking and undutiful; I know it is; and I am a very wicked young woman, or, as Mr. Penruan frequently tells me, a most heartless and unnatural creature, to talk in such an unfeeling strain of the sufferings of my angel mother. You won't offend me by agreeing with him; I always do that myself; it saves one so many discussions. And don't look as if you pitied me for my insensibility. Hearts are such troublesome possessions, that the stonier they are, the better for their owners."

"Curious philosophy this, isn't it?" queried the puzzled Max; and she laughed bitterly.

"Oh, Mr. Haveryng, if you stay longer than a day or two at Penruan Abbey, you will have to reconcile yourself to more conflicting things than my queer speeches. But come here, and tell me if you have seen anything in your travels more lovely than the view from those windows?"

Max followed the young lady to a broad and cushioned-seat beneath the casement, and listened and looked with interest while she named the spots visible on that sunny morning from Penruan Abbey.

He was just about to avail himself of a pause in the conversation to name Captain Renton, when a little bustle was heard at the door. It opened, and Mr. Penruan entered, with a lady on his arm, in the very becoming *deshabille* of an invalid. Her robe, *en princesse*, was of the palest pink cashmere, a color that harmonized admirably with her fair skin, and the blonde hair, over which some lace, looped with pink, was carelessly but effectively arranged.

She was plump, and would have been very pretty but for the air of languor that drew down the corners of her mouth, and gave an expression of suffering to a pair of still fine eyes, as dark and sparkling as her daughter's.

The maid who followed was loaded with shawls, pillows, and eider-down quilts, and some minutes elapsed before the lady was comfortably deposited on the couch prepared for her.

Mr. Penruan showed himself the most attentive of spouses, settling her cushions, and hovering about her with such tender assiduity, that Max began to feel ashamed of the feeling of repulsion which, in spite of his civilities, this gentleman had contrived to inspire.

At last, with a sigh and a smile, she pronounced herself tolerably comfortable, and her husband signed to Max to approach.

Eleanor had lounged on the window seat, and contemplated the sea, without testifying the smallest interest in what was passing in the room; but now she raised herself, and, with a little malicious pleasure, watched the introduction.

"A relation of yours, dear John," murmured Mrs. Penruan, holding out her hand to Max. "How pleased I am to know him! Ah! if I had but my health, how delighted I should be to drive him about the estate, and show him the improvements you have made!"

"Where are they?" asked Eleanor; but no one answered, though her mother held her vinaigrette to her nose, and shuddered a little, and Mr. Penruan cleared his throat.

"This is a sad house to come to, Mr. Haveryng," the invalid went on, in the soft, monotonous tones that never varied. "I am always the poor, helpless creature you now see. In fact, I should not be alive if it were not for the devotion of the best of husbands."

"My dearest Lina, you promised to try and swallow a little jelly," said Mr. Penruan, modestly ignoring his own praises.

"To please you; solely to please you. I have no appetite, Mr. Haveryng."

"But you ate a tolerable breakfast, mamma," interposed Eleanor, "and I think I met Carson on the stairs with a mutton-chop not an hour ago."

"Yes, I made an effort," Mrs. Penruan sighed. "It is our duty to preserve life as long as we can; is it not, Mr. Haveryng?"

"On mutton-chop, mamma?" queried her daughter, undaunted by the look Mr. Penruan bent upon her; but the lady's equanimity was not disturbed.

"Don't tease me, Nelly; there's a dear child; you ought to be thankful that I contrived to keep my strength up when you know what I went through this morning. Poor Fan-fan!"

"You need not look so serious, Mr. Haveryng," cried the irrepressible Eleanor. "Fan-fan is only an ugly little Skye-terrier, and a great pet of mamma's. The creature's teeth are decayed in consequence of being crammed with sweet cakes, and two of them have been extracted. Having nothing else to do, mamma has made herself very unhappy about her darling's sufferings."

"My nerves are so weak," Mrs. Penruan exclaimed, "that they are easily upset. Are you fond of dogs, Mr. Haveryng?"

"Of some kinds, extremely so," he replied.

"Then you shall nurse Fan-fan. Carson, give her to Mr. Haveryng. Is she not a beauty?"

"I am no judge of lap-dogs," said Max, eying contemptuously the fat, wheezy, hairy ball that was laid on his knees.

"Give her to me, Mr. Haveryng," said Eleanor; but Mrs. Penruan started up and snatched the dog away. "No, no, Nelly, you shall not have her; you are so intolerably awkward. Fan-fan always comes to grief when you take her."

Her daughter laughed mischievously; but ere she could make any reply, Mr. Penruan interposed with an offer to show his guest over the Abbey.

"Say no, Mr. Haveryng, for I am sure you'll not find any pleasure in beholding dust and decay," said Eleanor, in tones she scarcely took the trouble to lower. But for once, Max did not agree with her. He felt really desirous of seeing the house, and accepted Mr. Penruan's offer with a readiness that pleased that gentleman, and made his perverse step-daughter shrug her pretty shoulders.

After all, Eleanor was right. It was a depressing spectacle, for the decay that is made venerable by a reverent care to arrest it was not visible here. Repairs had been made where absolutely necessary, but only in the roughest, cheapest manner. Mr. Penruan may have loved the dwelling of his forefathers, but he evidently loved his money still more, and grudged spending it in renovating the Abbey.

The picture gallery pleased Max best, and there his entertainer thoroughly unbent, and related legends connected with the portraits, till the clanging of the dinner-bell disturbed them, and he led the young man to a tolerably comfortable bedchamber and dressing-room close by.

The evening was enlivened by the presence of a chatty little lieutenant in the navy, who had retired from the service some years previously on half-pay and a wooden leg, and was one of the few neighbors whose visits Squire Penruan tolerated. Lieutenant Hapsley sympathized with the invalid, joked pretty Eleanor on her roses and her pouting looks, recalled old scenes and adventures to amuse Max, and played backgammon with the Squire, till the clock struck ten—a signal always for the breaking up of the party.

Not at all inclined to sleep, Max had no sooner locked himself in his chamber than he resolved to write another letter to Mistress Letty, entreating her to end this mysterious reserve, and give him the opportunity for personally exculpating himself that he had already vainly entreated. But somehow, to-night, he could not satisfy himself with his epistolary attempts. His pleadings were not urgent enough;

they did not do sufficient justice to his anxiety to behold her once more; and sheet after sheet of paper was torn up in despair.

As he sat nibbling the top of his pen and gazing sometimes at the curiously-carved ceiling, sometimes at the floor, his wandering glances fell on the great old-fashioned toilet-glass close by. It reflected some of the old pictures—queer little oval miniatures of long-forgotten dames of the Penruan family; one, the largest if not the handsomest, representing a shepherdess seated on a grassy bank.

Something—was it the wind?—gave a tremulous motion to this portrait; and Max was just amusing himself with the notion that it was nodding to him in the glass, when he distinctly saw the panel on which it hung pushed forward from the wall, and some one peer at him through the opening.

In an instant, he was up and striding toward the spot; but when he reached it, the panel was firmly closed. Not a sound of retreating footsteps reached his ear, though he listened long and intently; not a voice made answer to his repeated inquiry, who was there? And he might have believed that some inequality in the surface of the mirror had deceived him but for one circumstance: the miniature had been shaken from its nail, and lay on the floor at his feet.

CHAPTER VII.

MAX BEGINS TO COMPREHEND THAT HIS PERPLEXITIES ARE ONLY JUST COMMENCED.

THERE could not be a braver man than Max Haveryng had proved himself in many a wild adventure; and he had spent more than one night with his finger on the trigger of his rifle, listening for the stealthy footfalls of the Indians, while his comrades slept around their camp-fire. Yet it was with very unpleasant sensations that he now seized the lamp to make the tour of his chamber and the adjoining dressing-room; and finally came back to the panel from whence the picture had fallen. But it gave back no hollow sound when he tapped it, and was to all appearance as solid a piece of the wainscoting as the rest.

Still the conviction was not to be shaken off that some one had moved it, and looked at him through the aperture. Certainly it might be only a servant, whose curiosity led to the act, or who was not aware that the apartment was occupied; and, as this was the most matter-of-fact and probable explanation of the circumstance, Max resolved to adopt it.

However, he could not determine to go to bed. Penruan Abbey was but half furnished and ill-secured, for some portion of the building was closed and almost in ruins. It was not at all impossible that burglars, tempted by a report of Mr. Penruan's wealth and miserly habits, had entered this part of the house, and were awaiting their opportunity to rob it. So Max, putting his watch and purse under his pillow, lowered the lamp till the room was in semi-obscurity, and laid down in his clothes, ready to leap up and render efficient assistance on the slightest alarm.

However, not a sound occurred to disturb him, and he sunk at last into a profound sleep, which lasted so long, that Eleanor opened her eyes in pretended astonishment, and threatened him with cold coffee and hard-boiled eggs when he did appear at the breakfast-table.

"Did not you sleep well, Mr. Haveryng?" she demanded; for the Squire was poring, with knitted brows, over some accounts, too much absorbed in the difficulty of deciphering a carpenter's hieroglyphics to do more than nod to his guest. "Did not you sleep well?"

"Not very;" and the slight hesitation in the speaker's manner was immediately detected.

"Perhaps the ghosts of the Abbey visited you and kept you awake? *Are th re any?* What a question! Of course there are! Did you ever hear of an old house that is not haunted? But I forgot—there are no ancient buildings in your country. Yes, Mr. Haveryng, we are as well endowed as our neighbors, for there are more spectral legends attached to Penruan than I care to repeat, and there is not a servant in the place who does not believe them."

"Are you equally credulous?" asked her auditor.

"Not in the daylight!" was the laughing reply. "As long as the sun shines, I can make merry over the wild, weird tales I hear, and marvel at the folly that has handed them down from generation to generation; but after nightfall, I am afraid I could not muster courage enough to visit some parts of the Abbey alone!"

"Have you ever heard, or ever seen, anything to awaken your fears?" the young man inquired.

"No! It's rather mortifying to be obliged to make such an avowal, isn't it? I haven't seen the shadow of anything worse than—Mr. Penruan since I have lived here. Some of the old people aver that this is because I am not actually a member of the family. So, perhaps, you will be more favored!"

"I suppose," said Max, speaking as carelessly as he could, "the Abbey contains some vestiges of a more romantic era: a secret passage, for instance—some sliding panels—and so on?"

But Eleanor answered with a very decided "No. The interior of the house was modernized and refitted about a hundred and twenty years ago; you can see that I am right in my chronology by the style of the old hangings; and I fancy all such vestiges, as you call them, were then swept away. I am sorry that it should be so," she added, with a smile, "as you are so anxious to be introduced to something of the kind."

"Then there are no mysteries nor secrets connected with the Penruan Abbey?" Max observed.

"I did not say *that*," Eleanor began, then checked herself, and looked down; nor was the conversation resumed till the Squire closed his accounts with a growl.

"B-r-d-s—one shilling! What does the fellow mean by that? Oh, brads, I suppose! He never used a shilling's worth! It's impossible! the scamps don't hammer a single nail in a board but there's a shilling clapped down for it!"

"I thought some of them were tenpenny ones!" observed Eleanor, very innocently.

"Have the goodness to keep your thoughts for subjects you can understand!" was the snappish retort. "I must go and have some of these items amended; it would not do to submit to such extortions! Never invest in house property, Mr. Haveryng! It's the worst return for money imaginable."

"Do your tenants get into arrears?" the young man civilly inquired, and Mr. Penraun looked disconcerted.

"Well, no—not exactly; but—"

"How can they," interrupted Eleanor, speaking with bitter emphasis, "when they are turned out to die—to starve—who cares how, if sickness or trouble overtakes them?"

"Repairs, Mr. Haveryng—repairs mount up enormously!" said the Squire, talking very loud to silence his irreverent step-daughter; "and the tradesmen are rogues, one and all! Why, I should be swindled hourly, if I did not attend to my affairs myself! Ring the bell, Eleanor, that my horse may be saddled. I must see this carpenter fellow at once, and threaten him with a visit from my lawyer. I know you'll excuse me. Business must be attended to!"

"Why not ask Mr. Haveryng to ride with you, sir, and let him learn a lesson from your example in the *noble* art of defending the pocket?"

"Condemn him to a dull ride over a dusty road, that he may play third in an interview with a saucy workman?" cried the Squire in sprightly tones. "No, no, my dear; I will not tax his patience so unkindly. He will enjoy himself much better here!"

The young lady glanced around the room, made a little movement of disgust, and audibly wondered in what way Mr. Haveryng would find the predicted enjoyment.

"Do not trouble about me," said Max hastily. "I can amuse myself in the library, or explore the grounds, or—"

"Nay, nay," interposed the smiling Squire; "we will not be so discourteous to our guest as to leave him quite alone. I give my young kinsman into your charge, Nelly. You will find him an agreeable companion, I am sure; and he will be delighted to walk or drive with you to some of the beautiful spots in the vicinity."

Eleanor raised her head, and gave her step-father a look inexplicable to Max; for it conveyed inquiry, defiance, and something very much like contempt. But Mr. Penruan would not appear to see it, and, with a friendly adieu to both, went away, in order to inquire how Mrs. Penruan found herself before he started on his journey.

"Did you ever feel a longing to bite any one, Mr. Haveryng?" demanded Eleanor, when the door had closed upon him. "Because I do; and I must go and have a battle with Ursa Minor before I will be better. I always get rid of my ill-humors when I have done my best to aggravate the lesser of my bugbears."

"Transfer your spleen to my shoulders," entreated Max. "I'd rather endure your sharpest speeches than be left alone, or know that you were running those frightful risks! Perhaps Mrs. Penruan is not so well, and you wish to devote the morning to her?"

"Don't play the hypocrite, Mr. Haveryng!" cried Eleanor, so crossly that he stared at her in amazement.

"Pray do not bring the charge of hypocrisy against me; for if there is anything I detest, it is that!"

"Then why do you make such a silly speech?" pouted the young lady. "Cannot you see as well as I do that mamma's ailments are only imaginary ones?"

"I thought she looked extremely plump and rosy for an invalid!" Max rather reluctantly confessed. "But then I remembered to have heard that in heart disease or consumption the looks are deceptive."

"Of course they are, but you may also have heard of people who begin by fancying that they are out of health, and, if they can find a doctor civil enough to humor them, end by believing that they are dreadful sufferers. Mamma will tell you that she is a martyr to her nerves, but she can listen with composure to what excites me almost to madness. She eats well, drinks well, sleeps soundly, and spends more time at her toilette than I do, and yet she wastes her days on that couch, which I would set on fire if I were not afraid of being found out!"

"Mr. Penruan seems to attach more importance to his wife's ailments than you do," Max could not resist telling her.

"He does," Eleanor admitted. "He is in a fidget if she complains, in a fright if she looks pale, and in agonies every time she has hysterics, lest she should never recover."

"And do you find fault with him for being such a devoted husband?" she was asked, rather indignantly.

She smiled a queer little smile.

"Oh, no, I dare say that if I were Mr. Penruan I should do as Mr. Penruan does, but I may be permitted to wish that he had sufficient common sense to second me in convincing mamma that there is nothing the matter with her."

"Mr. Penruan gives me the impression of being a *very* shrewd man," said Max.

Eleanor assented.

"So shrewd that he sometimes overreaches himself. But I wish you would not tempt me to talk to you so frankly, Mr. Haveryng. You must be a very sympathetic sort of person, or my tongue would not have run with such freedom on this short acquaintance."

"It is the first time I ever received such a doubtful compliment," he answered, with a smile.

"Doubtful?" Eleanor echoed.

"Yes; to be sympathetic is not a masculine quality—is it? I thought it applied to the *confidantes*, in white muslin, of tragic heroines, or the dear female friends young ladies are so fond of telling their secrets to."

"I have no female friends—I might say, no friends at all!" she replied, quickly; "and so your sarcasm does not apply to me. But if I am to entertain you, Mr. Haveryng, I must find some better way than 'plaining my own lot.' Put on your hat, and let us go into my garden. As it is only one tiny plot, saved with difficulty from the Goths and Vandals, it will not tire you to walk round it."

"I fancied the Abbey gardens were extensive when I peeped at them from my bedroom window," Max remarked, as he obeyed her.

"Why, so they are; but fruit and vegetables sell so well that Mr. Penruan has turned the flower-borders into asparagus-beds, and grows brocoli where I used to cultivate lilies of the valley. Can you dig, Mr. Haveryng? Then you shall help me to transplant some roses, for my revered step-father will not allow a gardener to waste his time in attending to me."

Eleanor's garden was a charming little nook, and Max spent an hour or two very pleasantly in pruning her rose-trees, and making some alterations she had planned, but could not accomplish without the aid of stronger arms. Indeed, he worked so hard that, when the sun grew high, she insisted that he should lay down his tools.

"You shall not call me a thankless task-mistress," she sportively said, "for I will reward your services by bringing your lunch to my own favorite retreat, if you have courage enough to accompany me to it."

Eleanor ran back to the house, while her companion was laving his hands at the spring that bubbled up into a rocky basin; and when her clear voice was again heard, calling him by name, he saw that she had quitted the garden by a little gate in the wall, and was standing on the edge of the cliffs, awaiting his approach. As he drew near she clambered to the top of a huge bowlder, and lightly leaped down on the other side; but when Max reached the spot she had disappeared, and there was nothing to be seen but a deep chasm, dark, and overgrown with ferns, like the mouth of some long disused well.

A merry laugh from the vanishing maiden answered his anxious exclamation.

"Have you the courage to dive into the recesses of the earth, Mr. Haveryng? Then, swing yourself down by both hands; the fairies of the cavern will take care that you come to no harm."

Ashamed to hesitate, Max obeyed, and dropped into the chasm, which, after all, was of no depth. Then, stooping his tall head and turning to the right, in obedience to the directions he received, he found himself in one of the most fantastic and exquisite of the caverns with which the rocky coast of the country is so liberally pierced. There was nothing rugged or repellent here; the mouth of the cavern was a lofty arch, looking seaward, and ferns in endless variety fringed the opening, and threw out their delicate fronds from every crevice on the rocky walls and roof. Across the mouth of the cave, and rendering it inaccessible from that point, fell the same stream that filled the basin in Eleanor's garden. This brook went leaping from ledge to ledge, a mere thread in the heats of summer, but a torrent after the snows of winter. Just now it might have been likened to some tricksy sprite, as it flung its light spray over the fairy clusters of the maiden's hair, and the towering *Osumunda Regalis*, and bathed them into a fresher, brighter verdure.

Sitting here, watching the white sails of a distant vessel, and discussing the sandwiches Eleanor produced from her little basket, the young man ventured to ask a question to which his whole soul was hungering for an answer.

"Of course you are well acquainted with the neighborhood of St. Erne, cousin Eleanor?"

"Not very. In hot weather the walk is a fatiguing one, and there is so much distress in these fishing villages whenever it is too cold and stormy for the boats to go out, that I cannot bear to confront it, unless my purse is tolerably full."

This was discouraging, but still Max persevered.

"These poor fishers were very kind to me while I lay ill. I suppose you know most of them?"

"By sight, yes. They are fine, sturdy, warm-hearted fellows! I cannot sleep when the wind is rough, for thinking of those who are toiling on the deep, and the anxiety of the wives and mothers who watch and weep for them at home."

"Are you acquainted with Daniel Calynack, the old man who nursed me in his little cottage?"

Eleanor nodded assent.

"Dangerous quarters for you, wasn't it, Mr. Haveryng? Old Dan is supposed to have dealings with the Piskies" (fairies), "and is regarded altogether as an uncanny sort of person. He did not cast his spells over you, did he?"

"Not that I am aware of," said Max, annoyed at feeling a ruddy hue overspreading his face. "Do you know Dan's niece?"

"Has he one? Is it some twinge of conscience connected with the poor girl that has caused you to redden so guiltily? Oh, Mr. Haveryng, it will be an ungenerous return for the kindness of which you speak if you have made some simple child unhappy!"

"Daniel Calynack's niece is a widow," she was curtly told.

"I beg your pardon. I hope my blunt speeches have not offended you," Eleanor exclaimed. "What is this widow's name? Is there any way in which you wish me to serve her?"

The kindly warmth of her manner induced Max to unbosom himself a little further.

"She calls herself Mrs. Letitia Rayne, and is so superior in manners and appearance to the old fisherman, that I have some curiosity to know more about her than she was willing to tell. I thought you might have been able to gratify me, but if the name is not familiar—"

He paused, and looked inquiringly at his fair companion, who mused awhile before replying.

"If I remember rightly, I have heard mention made of a reckless, dissolute fellow called Tom Rayne, who came to St. Erne occasionally, and was a great trouble to old Dan. He must have been the spouse of your widow, for there are no families of that name resident in this neighborhood."

"Yes, it is the same, I suppose," Max replied; but even as he did so he was asking himself if it could be possible that this pure, white lily, so delicate, so refined, was ever the wedded wife of a drunken, reckless fisherman?

"It is impossible! I will never believe it!" he exclaimed, unconsciously speaking aloud. Then, seeing Eleanor's surprise, he stammered, confusedly, "Do you know how long he has been dead?"

"Who? Rayne? Let me think. Ah, yes, I recollect now hearing some one say that Dan Calynack's cousin, or nephew—whichever it might be—was killed in a brawl at a low public-house at Plymouth."

"How long since?"

"I believe it must be three years at least since he was at St. Erne, and his death happened soon after his last visit."

Why, then, here was confirmation strong that Max had concluded rightly, for Mistress Letty must have been little more than a child at that time; and the weeds of widowhood were either a disguise, or donned for some one very different to the Tom Rayne of Eleanor Haydon's story.

"Are you very much interested in this bereaved matron, Mr. Haveryng?" was the inquiry with which

his fair companion presently aroused him from the reverie into which he had fallen.

His answering "I am, indeed!" was spoken so emphatically as to silence the teasing speeches hovering on Eleanor's lips. She looked as if her feminine curiosity would be on the *qui vive* till she learned more, but Max was evidently in no humor to be questioned. With his head on his hand, he was gazing out at sea, mentally recalling every look and tone of the mysterious Letty; and still more vividly arose before him the agitation she had betrayed when he acknowledged himself to be a relative of Mr. Penruan.

In what way she was connected with the Squire remained to be learned, and it appeared as if the information was only to be had from that gentleman himself. Miss Haydon, from whom Max had been hoping to glean so much, could tell him nothing; she was either in ignorance of Miss Letty's very existence, or baffled by her assumption of the name and character she had chosen to adopt; and it seemed useless questioning her any further.

"When you are sufficiently rested," Eleanor observed at last, "it may be as well to return to the upper regions. Once there, you may regain your lost senses, and the faculty of saying a civil thing or two. I can put up with half an hour of utter silence, but more than that tries my patience dreadfully."

"Pray forgive my rudeness," said Max, "and do not go till you have given me some information about a mutual friend whom I hoped to have met at Penruan. I mean Captain Renton."

Eleanor, who had been carelessly reclining on a rude bench, arranging the ferns she had plucked, started up with glowing cheeks and dilated eyes, and began to look at and question Haveryng distrustfully.

"Do you know him? What has he told you? What has he said about me? Why have you concealed this from me till now?"

"Don't begin to bring accusations against me till I have some conception as to what I have done amiss," retorted Max, not at all sorry to have turned the tables upon her. "I'll answer your questions, if you please, in the order you put them."

She reseated herself, and bent over her ferns, so as to conceal her crimson face, but did not speak, and Max proceeded:

"Do I know Captain Renton? Yes. I met with him in London, and liked him so well, that when he spoke of visiting Cornwall, I insisted on having the address of the friends with whom he talked of staying, that I might renew our acquaintance. Singularly enough, I found that his destination was Penruan. Secondly, what has Captain Renton said about Miss Eleanor Haydon? I answer, nothing."

"That will do; you need go no further; I am quite satisfied. It is pleasanter sometimes to know one's self forgotten than remembered."

"I should not think it was easy to forget you, cousin Eleanor," said Max, softly.

"Why? because I have a hot temper and a sharp tongue? No, don't answer with a compliment to my pretty face, because I shall not thank you for it. But tell me what you want to know about Captain Renton."

"Only whether I am likely to see him while I am here."

"I hope not. I mean he will not come if he has sense enough to take the advice I gave him when he followed us to Penruan a few weeks since."

"Has Captain Renton been so unfortunate as to offend you?" Max ventured to ask; and her countenance softened to a pensive gravity, while something very much like a tear glistened in her dark eyes.

"Offended me? No, no. I would be the most faithful of his friends if he would let me! Poor Charlie! He is one of the best fellows in the world, Mr. Haveryng. I wish you could persuade him to accompany you when you go back to California. He could get leave of absence, and the thorough change of scene would make a stronger, wiser man of him."

"Before I ask him to do this, I ought to ascertain how far it would be palatable. He may have cogent reasons for preferring to stay in England."

But Eleanor was leading the way back to the entrance of the cave, and did not choose to continue the conversation. Max assisted her to climb some rough steps in the side of the chasm, that made the ascent easier, and then walked beside her to the house, where she led the way to the library.

"Here I shall leave you, Mr. Haveryng, if you think you can amuse yourself with such a poor collection of books as these shelves contain."

"Thanks; I can make myself very comfortable in that fine oriel, with the daily paper and my pipe, if smoking here is not forbidden. I saw Mr. Penruan's pouch and meerschaum lying on yonder table, or should not have ventured to propose it."

Eleanor smilingly gave her permission, and was tripping away when Max observed: "I must not forget my way back to the other rooms. At present I am not quite up to the latitude and longitude of the Abbey. Where would yonder door lead me?"

There was a little hesitation perceptible in her manner as she replied, "That one is locked. It leads to a part of the house we do not use. If you should lose yourself, you must cry out for help, and I'll be good-natured enough to come to your assistance."

She left him, and Max, lying full length on a curiously carved settee, placed beneath the oriel window, smoked at his ease, and thought the while of Letty, or laid wild schemes for watching the cottage of Dan Calynack, and tracking the old fisherman to her abode. No one broke in upon his meditations for the first hour or so; but just as he was debating whether he should re-fill his meerschaum, or go and finish his work in Eleanor's garden, one of the female servants entered the library. She did not perceive the recumbent figure on the settee, but crossed the room to the locked door, at which she tapped three times. At the third tap it was opened. The girl interchanged a few words in whispers with some one on the other side; the door was reclosed, a key grating in the lock, and the servant quitted the library, still unconscious of the presence of Max.

A trivial circumstance this to record, but he could not banish it from his memory, for had not Eleanor Haydon—the proud and apparently truth-loving Eleanor—assured him, not two hours earlier, that this door communicated with a portion of the Abbey that was not used? How was he to reconcile her statement with that he had just seen?—and if Eleanor knew what it was a false one, why did she palm it upon him?

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHASE, AND HOW IT BEGAN.

MR. PENRUAN did not return home till after his lady and Eleanor had joined Max in the drawing-room, and the cook had grown uneasy about her dishes. When he did make his appearance, a chill fell upon the trio awaiting him, for the first glance revealed that his humor had changed since the morning.

The carpenter had manfully defended himself against the charge of extortion, and by his bold bearing so incensed his accuser, that Mr. Penruan had ridden off to his lawyer. Here another vexation awaited him. The only person on his estate in whom he placed any confidence had taken advantage of that confidence to outwit him in some bargain, and the discovery rendered the avaricious Squire more furious than before.

Mr. Penruan's was not the wrath that expends itself in oaths and angry exclamations. It smoldered like some undetected fire, and was, therefore, all the more dangerous, for it fed upon itself, and none knew when nor where it would burst forth.

At its present stage, it was evinced by an ominous sullenness, which not even the presence of a guest induced him to throw off; and certainly Mr. Penruan in the sulks was one of the ugliest specimens of an ill-tempered man that could be witnessed.

To Max, the Squire's lowering looks and gruff monosyllables mattered little, for the Californian was too good-humored to take offense at the peevishness of a man so many years his senior; and his half-civilized life had taught him to bear and forbear, except when his hot blood was fairly roused by insult or ill-usage.

He chatted, therefore, and laughed as freely as before the Squire returned; but he was the only one present who could behave with such careless unconcern. The servants were nervous, and evidently afraid to move; and Mrs. Penruan, at other times the petted invalid, now shrunk into herself, cast scared looks at her tyrant, and did not venture to draw his attention upon her by the utterance of any of the plaintive little murmurs in which she generally indulged.

Eleanor, on the contrary, sat erect and defiant; the rich crimson on her cheek deepening, and her nostrils dilating with indignation, every time the Squire's rudeness became offensive. To her it was marked; he did not condescend to pay her the commonest courtesies due to a lady at the dinner-table; and had she not chosen to partake of a side dish near at hand, her plate would have remained empty.

At last, some trifling mistake, made by the footman in waiting, resulted in the plate he had nearly dropped being flung at his head with such savage violence, that the man staggered and turned pale.

Involuntarily, Max rose, and Eleanor did the same, and drew nearer to her mother, who had stifled a faint shriek in her pocket handkerchief, and closed her eyes.

"Will you give your arm to mamma, Mr. Haveryng?" asked the young lady, her clear, incisive tones ringing with the scorn she did not care to conceal. "She cannot accustom herself to Mr. Penruan's gentlemanly treatment of his servants!"

"Yes, I had better go to my room," gasped the poor lady, with an entreating glance at her daughter. "I'm not very well; the—the draughts from the door affect me. Dear Eleanor," she added, in a whisper, "pray say no more."

The young girl bit her lip, and signed to Max to lead her mother away; but before Mrs. Penruan's shawl could be arranged to her liking, or her other wraps and cushions collected, there was a little stir under the table, and Mr. Penruan starting up, exclaimed, "Here is a dog in the room! Whose dog is it?"

Eleanor sprung forward. There was only one creature of the canine species tolerated at the Abbey besides the fierce yard dog and her mother's spotted favorite—an old retriever that had attached itself to her, and always lay on the mat at her door at night. To this dog Mr. Penruan had frequently testified a dislike, and it was therefore kept as much as possible out of his way; but Rufe, catching a glimpse of his young mistress, had crept after her into the dining-room, and might have lain there undiscovered if he had not emerged from his hiding-place to follow her when she quitted her seat.

"Rufe has not done any harm, Mr. Penruan," she said, interposing herself between her frowning step-father and the dog. "I will take him away with me."

Vouchsafing no notice of her interference, the Squire still moved toward the animal, "on vicious purposes intent," and again Eleanor would have shielded her favorite; but grasping her by the arm, Mr. Penruan held her back, while he bestowed on Rufe a savage kick, that sent the poor creature howling from the room.

The yelps of the dog were supplemented by the shrill screams of Mrs. Penruan, who, sinking from the supporting arms of Max, lay back in her chair, beating the air with her hands in violent hysterics.

The confusion was now extreme; the Squire certainly hurried to his lady's assistance, but at the same time so loudly abused the servants whom his shouts and peal at the bell brought into the room, that the restoratives for which they were dispatched proved ineffectual; and the scene would have been ludicrous if it had not verged on the disgusting.

"Come away," said Eleanor, touching Max on the arm. "We can be of no use here, and do but expose ourselves to insult by remaining."

"But your mother?" asked Max, with a glance at the distorted features of the struggling lady.

Eleanor's look followed the direction of his, and she sighed, but answered: "Mamma will do well enough. She will scream till she is exhausted, and by that time Mr. Penruan will be alarmed and penitent. Cold water and a stern remonstrance are the only remedies that would be really effectual in these attacks, and it is no use suggesting them; so let us go into the garden."

But though Mr. Penruan's step-daughter talked with such calm and bitter significance, Max found that the hand resting on his sleeve was trembling; and there were hot tears glistening on her eyelashes, as they strolled along the grass-grown terrace.

"Penruan Abbey isn't the pleasantest of houses to visit at," she said, presently. "You must not go back to America imagining that what you see and hear here are fair specimens of the manners and customs of the English gentry. We are an exceptional family, Mr. Haveryng; you will not care to stay long with us."

"I shall be sorry to go away," Max answered, frankly; "and I suppose storms will ruffle the calmest seas sometimes."

"Ay, but such gales as we have had to-day ruffle our domestic atmosphere too often! If Mr. Penruan would but control himself in the presence of strangers, I could better bear it," she added, passionately. "I am ashamed that you should have witnessed such conduct."

"Pooh!" said Max, anxious to make light of what had occurred. "You forget that I am a relative, and ought to feel flattered that Mr. Penruan refuses to treat me as a stranger."

"You must be very proud of such kinship," cried Eleanor, scornfully. "If you knew—if I could bring myself to tell you—"

Here the young man gently interrupted her.

"My dear cousin, why dwell on such unpleasant topics?—they do but excite you, and make us both uncomfortable. If you could but resolve to turn a deaf ear to the snappish speeches of an ill-tempered old man—"

But now, Eleanor could be silent no longer.

"What! bend my neck to his yoke—suffer myself to be wronged and trampled on in every way? Can you bid me do this after what you saw just now? Can you expect me to be forbearing to the unfeeling man who ill-treated the poor dog that loves me, and uses me thus, when I interfere in its behalf?"

As she spoke she held up her round white arm, and Max saw that Squire Penruan, in grasping it, had dug his nails into the soft flesh with a force that had left the purple and bleeding imprints of his violence.

An indignant exclamation burst from the lips of the young man, and he turned sharply round to return to the dining-room.

But Eleanor detained him.

"What are you going to do?"

"What should I do, but seek Mr. Penruan, and tell him what I think of such dastardly conduct!"

"And bring down his wrath upon your own head?"

Max drew himself up.

"*Caramba!* what signifies that? Who is John Penruan, that I should hesitate to speak my mind in his hearing? He can but bid me leave his house when I have done!"

But still Eleanor, half-laughing, half-tearful, clung to his arm.

"And you would be content to leave the Abbey, and see me no more? For shame, sir! how ungallant! No, no, Mr. Haveryng; I positively forbid you to remonstrate with my step-father. I am grateful for your sympathy, but I cannot accept your championship. In fact—and now I appeal to your sober sense—*it would do more harm than good*, and possibly might compel me to quit the Abbey."

"The very step I should advise you to take. Surely you have friends, who would give you a happier home than you can enjoy under the roof of Mr. Penruan?"

Eleanor shook her head.

"I cannot leave the Abbey; it is not to be thought of. If you really wish to be my friend, Mr. Haveryng, you will help me to forget what has happened this evening, and to practice some of that forbearance you advocate. Do you know that your friend, Captain Renton, is threatening to pay us a flying visit?"

She was evidently desirous of changing the subject, and Max could but follow her lead, so the evil moods of the Squire were not alluded to again during their stroll, which was prolonged till the moon rose; and when they re-entered the house, Eleanor pleaded fatigue, and went to her own rooms, an example Max thought it would be prudent to follow. There he secured himself from another nocturnal visit by dragging an old-fashioned wardrobe across the panel from which he still believed that some one had peered at him on the previous night.

On the morrow, Mr. Penruan no sooner entered the breakfast-parlor than he made a confused apology to his guest for the unpleasantness of the preceding day.

"I am afraid we made you uncomfortable among us, Mr. Haverying, and perhaps I was in some measure the cause; but my wife's delicate health preys upon my spirits, and when to that is added the anxieties that always attend property, the stupidity of the servants, and the obstinate— But, come, kinsman, we'll not wait for the ladies. I want you to taste these mackerel, caught on our coast not more than two hours ago, and boiled directly; it is the only way of eating the fish at its prime."

Max looked bewildered at the sudden change in his host's manner, till he perceived that Eleanor had entered the room while Mr. Penruan was speaking. To her that gentleman did not seem to think any apology necessary; but as soon as the meal was over, he carried Max away to show him, and have his opinion on, some improvements on the farm attached to the Abbey.

As Eleanor was invisible when Max made his escape, and Mrs. Penruan was not well enough to leave her chamber, he resolved to avail himself of the opportunity for strolling as far as the cottage of Dan Calynack. But the old fisherman was out, and the cottage, where he had spent so many happy hours beside Mistress Letty, was closely shut up.

Disappointed in the hope of receiving that message, or a reply to his letter, which he still believed that she would intrust to Dan for him, Max re-climbed the cliffs, and strolled across the fields on the summit toward the primitive little town, that lay some five miles on the other side of the Abbey. As he neared it, he remembered to have heard Eleanor express a wish that she had some fine wire for mounting some feather flowers she was making, and he turned into the High street, and sought for a shop where the article could be procured.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE CHASE IN WHICH MAX ENGAGED PROGRESSED AND ENDED.

WHEN Max entered the low-ceilinged, badly-lighted emporium, a woman was already at the counter, purchasing some stationery. She started, and moved aside, drawing down her vail as he approached, and bending over the goods she was selecting in such a manner as to wholly conceal her face from his view.

If it had not been for these movements, he might not have noticed her at all; but he came from a country where the eye and ear are tutored to be

constantly on the alert, and her desire to avoid him was quickly detected.

Max took a close survey of her. She was neatly and simply clothed; a dark stuff dress, a black shawl, and an old-fashioned bonnet—the attire, in every respect, of a decent, homely farmer's wife. That she was not young the squat, set figure revealed, as well as the hand she had ungloved while inspecting some envelopes; and, rather amused at her evident desire to avoid observation, he turned from her and began inquiring for the article he wished to procure.

Finishing her purchases in haste, the woman paid for them, and still with her face carefully averted, took up her parcel and left the shop. The proprietor was at the door arranging some packages, and civilly bade her good-morning as she passed him.

The words were hurriedly responded to in full, deep, and rather harsh tones, which no sooner reached the ears of Max, than he forgot what he was saying to the shopman.

Where had he heard those strangely familiar tones? Ah! now he knew, now he remembered well enough, and guessed why she had striven to avoid him. The voice to which he had been listening was the voice of Esther, that mysterious friend and companion of Mistress Letty, to whose influence he attributed the young widow's refusal to see him. From her everything was to be learned, if he could but convince her that no dishonorable motives dictated his curiosity. From her might be gleaned a clew to Letty's present abode, her reasons for hiding herself and for assuming the name and disguise which she wore; and telling himself this, Max hurried from the shop, determined to follow her.

One glance up and then down the street. Had she already evaded him? Nay, surely that was her chocolate skirt disappearing round the corner of a house some fifty yards off. Yes, it was she; and with reckless haste he dashed across the road, and up the village in hot pursuit.

The impetuous Max had not gone many steps before the curious looks cast at him by the women standing at their doors, as well as the few persons he met, reminded him that it would be wise to moderate his pace, and act with more circumspection. He, therefore, resolved to content himself with keeping the woman in sight, and this was easily done when she quitted the narrow alley into which she had turned, for a path across the fields, leading toward the coast.

But as she climbed the heap of stones that take the place of a stile in some parts of the county, she glanced over her shoulder, and discovered that she was pursued. That this discovery was a very unpleasant one her actions speedily evinced, for after pausing for a few seconds in evident incertitude and distress, she changed her course, and began to make for some tangled coppices that formed the boundaries of an estate lying between the town and Penruan Abbey. Once there, she doubtless thought that by plunging into the depths of the woodland, it would be easy enough to evade a person so thoroughly unacquainted with the locality as Max must be; and sometimes walking, but more frequently running, she pursued her way, not venturing to look back, lest it should delay her.

But nearly a mile of rough road lay between the flying woman and the copse in which she thought to hide; and the long, steady strides of the Californian still brought him nearer and nearer, in spite of her exertions.

At last the bank surrounding the trees was reached, but, as she climbed it, Max ascended also, and was by her side.

Still, after one sharp glance at him, she walked on, more leisurely, perhaps, than before, and waited for him to accost her; but he contented himself with keeping pace with her, turning when she turned; or when the path was too narrow for them to walk abreast, following in her footsteps.

Again she turned her eyes upon him, as if longing to penetrate his motives for this silent pertinacity: and Max met her gaze without flinching. But still he remained mute; and, muttering something to herself, she began to wander at random, up one path and then down another, frequently returning to the spot from whence she started, as if thus hoping to weary him into quitting her; a vain hope, as she presently discovered.

At last tired, hot, and angry, she set her back against a tree, threw up her vail, and sharply expostulated.

"What do you mean by this strange behavior, sir? Why do you follow me?"

"Because I am anxious to know where you reside, and have no other way of discovering your abode."

"And so you are going to *force* me into showing you? Would it not be more gentlemanly to put the question to me, and let me have the option of telling or refusing, as I think proper?"

"It would," was frankly admitted; "and if I had seen any reason to believe that you would tell me the truth, I would have done so. But you are not my friend—you never have been. Your anxiety to avoid me is a sufficient proof that you will show me no favor; and as I am determined to see Mistress Letty, I am obliged to have recourse to the measures of which you complain."

"Why do you wish to see her?" the woman demanded, suspiciously.

"Because I value her good opinion too highly to be satisfied till I have convinced her that I am not the dishonorable fellow she seemed inclined to think me."

"She has had your letter," he was curtly informed.

"But the answer? I have received no answer to it. Why cannot I hear it from her own lips? Why does she so obstinately refuse me an interview? While she continues to do this, how can I hope that I am forgiven?"

"Letty has granted you too many interviews, Mr. Haveryng," the woman retorted. "I was opposed to it from the beginning. It was a foolish piece of business altogether, and if you have a spark of generosity or good feeling in you, why you will neither torment her nor me any longer."

"It is as I told you," said Max, brusquely. "You prejudiced yourself against me, even when I lay before you helpless, and apparently dying. What offense have I given that you treat me with such galling distrust, and strive to imbue others with your unjust notions."

"Well, sir, and if we come to that," she answered, looking intently at him, "what reason have I to think well of you? You meet with an accident, and are kindly taken care of by a poor old man; and you repay him by talking nonsense to his niece, and striving to pry into her affairs. At the same time, you take care to keep your own secret. It isn't till you are on the point of leaving the cottage that the truth leaks out, and you confess that you are a relative of Squire Penruan!"

"Is it a crime to be related to him?"

"No, sir; but it's very certain that one who can call himself cousin to such a rich gentleman as the Squire, wouldn't look for a wife in a fisherman's cottage; and it would do Letty no good to be seen talking too often to visitors at the Abbey."

"Is Letty your daughter?"

"Not by birth. I wish she were. I am her aunt Esther; and now, sir, I'll trouble you to let me go my way. I've answered quite questions enough that mean nothing!"

But Max did not move even when she emphatically repeated her request. There was so much justice in what she said, that it was difficult, indeed, to press his desire to see Mistress Letty. And yet, to forego that pleasure—to quit England without beholding her—ah! the thought made him grasp the woman's hand impetuously.

"It is no use. I must and will see her, even if it be but to hear her say one word of farewell. I never intentionally vexed her. So far from prying into her secrets, I strove to subdue my curiosity, and obey her lightest injunctions. Remind her of this. Assure her from me that I had no hidden motive for my silence respecting Mr. Penruan; in fact, that I scarcely thought of him while I was at Dan Calynack's cottage."

"Well, sir; and when I have told her all this, what then?" asked the woman, dryly.

"Then entreat her to see me. If you consent to the interview, I cannot think that she will refuse it."

"It would do no good. It would only make her more—"

But here she paused, and mused awhile, Max waiting almost breathlessly for her decision. It was as he feared it would be—an adverse one.

"No, sir; I can't consent to any more meetings, for I fail to see the use of them. My poor Letty's very awkardly situated—I don't mind telling you that much; and there's danger in—in her coming here, that she ought not to incur without a better reason for it than an idle young gentleman's wishes."

"What are her own?" asked Max. "Are not they to be consulted? Is it solely by her own desire that she avoids me?"

The woman hesitated, as she replied, "Letty has said more than once that she cannot put any trust in the honor or good feeling of a Penruan."

"What has Mr. Penruan done to make her speak and think so bitterly of every one connected with him? For goodness sake, tell me; for I am sick of this tormenting mystery!"

"Nay, sir," she answered, retreating from him; "it's not my place to find fault with the Squire; and even if I do think my Letty has cause for what she says, it would not be wise to make a confidant of one of his nearest relations, would it?"

"I have no desire to learn anything to Mr. Penruan's prejudice," said Max, haughtily; "though I protest against evil motives or doings being imputed to me, because his father and mine claimed kinship. Once again, I ask you if you will permit Mistress Letty to see me? You can be present at our meeting; I care not who hears what I have to say. But I am so fully convinced by what you have admitted that it is your influence keeps us apart, that I'll not rest till I have found her. If you will not assist me to do so, I must try what my own efforts will effect."

"And you don't care what mischief you do so that you carry out your own willful intentions!" said Esther, bitterly. "Sir, this poor child has suffered enough without *your* bringing more troubles upon her head!"

"I will do nothing to injure her—I swear it!" he answered, with all the fervor of truth. "Make what conditions you please, and I will abide by them; I will await your time for the interview, and it shall be as brief as you please. Only give me the opportunity of exculpating myself—of hearing her say that she will not distrust me. I ask no more."

"And for the selfish pleasure of hearing a simple girl say that she believes you to be a man of honor, you persist in seeing her, in spite of my warning that it may do her harm. Oh, sir, your own willful wishes must be dearer to you than Letty's comfort or safety, or you would not keep urging me to do what I feel to be so unwise."

"If you can say, *with truth*, that Mistress Letty will run any risk by granting me this interview," said the perplexed Max, looking terribly disappointed, "I must renounce my wish. But it is indeed hard to do so—very hard!"

"Nay, sir; you'll not regret it by-and-by," said Esther, her face brightening as his grew sad. "And Letty's prayers will be with you wherever you go!"

"Stay!" said Max. "You hint at troubles that menace her. She herself has spoken in a similar manner; and it is plain that you think so meanly of me as to imagine that I shall go away from Cornwall, leaving her to overcome her difficulties unaided. But in this you are mistaken. I will not press her to see me while you forbid it; but, on the other hand, I refuse to quit the neighborhood till Mistress Letty can herself convince me that she has nothing to fear."

"You are playing false with me, Mr. Haveryng!" cried the vexed woman. "At one moment, you profess to give up your own inclinations; at the next, you insist upon haunting the poor child! I suppose you will end in making her more miserable than she is already!"

"Be just to me, if you can!" was the reply. "I have promised to wait Mistress Letty's own time for the renewal of our acquaintance, and also that I will do nothing that she forbids, nor seek to discover her secrets; but I should be dishonored in my own opinion, if I went away knowing that I leave her, to use your own words, in difficulty and danger. By staying quietly here, I cannot harm her; by going, I rob myself of the chance of serving her hereafter."

"I suppose, sir, you'll please yourself, let me say what I will?" the woman tartly remarked. "So I'll bid you good-day!"

Max would have pressed a sovereign into her hand for a new ribbon, but the gift was proudly rejected.

"I am in a good situation, sir, and earn enough to buy all I want, without accepting presents from any one!"

She walked on, but still Max kept beside her; and when by a look she protested against this, he once more laid his hand upon her arm.

"You leave me even more perplexed than I was before I saw you; but of that I will not complain. If you are conscientiously doing your duty by Mistress Letty, I must respect your conduct, much as it grieves me!"

She curtsied, and looked gratified by the frank admission.

"But still," he went on, "I think that you might have shown some consideration for my perplexities. It is but little that I ask now; a few lines from Letty herself, in reply to my letters."

"And then, sir, you'd write again, and—"

"I will do nothing of the kind, if Letty forbids it," he hastened to say.

Esther furtively glanced at the handsome, earnest face of the Californian, and her own visibly softened. Surely there was no treachery lurking in those honest blue eyes, and against her will she yielded.

"When I see her, I'll tell her that she can write if she likes."

"When you see her!" he repeated. "Why, then, she is not at St. Erne?"

"No, Mr. Haveryng."

"Nor residing with you?"

"I hold a confidential situation, sir, in the family of a gentleman in this neighborhood."

"Then why do you object to my knowing your address?" he demanded, suspiciously.

The woman reddened.

"'Tisn't that, sir. I dare say you can know where I live soon enough, if you take any further trouble about me; but I didn't wish to give you an opportunity of asking me any more questions about Letty. That was my reason for trying to avoid you."

"And she is not with you, and I must submit to a longer delay!" Max exclaimed. "But you will deliver my message at the earliest moment? Promise me this!"

"Yes," said Esther; "and the answer you ask for shall be at Daniel Calynack's in three days from the present." Then, as if instantly repenting her pledge, she raised her clasped hands, and with features working convulsively, ejaculated, "I pray forgiveness if I have done wrong; and may every hour of your future life be turned into a curse, if by look, word, or deed, you wrong those that trust in your honor!"

She darted away among the trees—ashamed, perhaps, of this outbreak of excited feeling—and Max walked slowly back to the Abbey, rejoicing over the one ray of light that pierced the clouds—the prospect of a letter from Mistress Letty at last!

CHAPTER X.

HOW MAX WAS VIEWED AND JUDGED BY JAUNDICED EYES.

As if eager to banish all recollections of his churlish behavior, Mr. Penruan had become more gracious than ever to his young guest, and even included Eleanor Haydon in his courtesies. Under the influence of his good-humor, Mrs. Penruan gained courage to emerge from her chamber, and resume her place on her invalid couch in the drawing-room, and to casual observers all was sunshine once more.

"We must try and prevail with Max"—he had even reached the length of calling his kinsman by his Christian name—"we must prevail with him, Nelly, to stay with us all the summer."

"Why, sir?" asked Eleanor, looking up from her work, and trying to attract his attention.

But Mr. Penruan laughed and rubbed his hands together, without appearing at all disconcerted.

"Why, indeed? Need I tell you that I wish it because he is a great acquisition to our small family, and your mother unites with me in hoping that he will not be in too great a hurry to leave us. Do you not, Matilda?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Penruan, languidly. "My sufferings make me a poor companion for young people, but I like to see them enjoy themselves; and if you think, John, that there is anything I can do to make Mr. Haveryng's visit an agreeable one, I shall be most happy."

Max so warmly thanked her for her kind speech, that she was aroused to make another.

"We have never associated much with our neighbors, on account of my health, and"—she glanced at her husband, and colored slightly—"and for other reasons; but if we could gather enough people together for a picnic or croquet party, I would try and nerve myself to receive the guests. Or Eleanor might do that," she added, with increasing eagerness, "and I could appear afterward, and be carried in a palanquin round the grounds. I could have the cushions I recline upon covered with some pretty Oriental-looking material, and my maid could make up that Bengal silk—it is just the tint for my complexion, and—"

But here Mr. Penruan broke in with a very decided, "My dear Matilda, it is not to be thought of. I cannot let you risk your precious life by such exertions!"

The lady put her handkerchief to her eyes; she was just finding out that the *role* of an invalid is not always a pleasant one, and there was an awkward pause.

"But Mr Haveryng will stay, will he not?" she asked, presently. "I should like to have the mournful gratification of knowing that he will follow me to my grave. And, John, dear, I should like to be buried at Torquay, because the air of that place always suited me so well."

"Mamma," cried Eleanor, jumping up, "it is too ridiculous when you rush from a picnic to an elaborate funeral; and the same objection applies to both, doesn't it, Mr. Penruan?—the *expense*. Captain Renton will be here shortly, and he and Mr. Haveryng must contrive to amuse each other while they consent to vegetate at this dull hole."

"Renton going to honor us with a visit?" commented the Squire, blandly. "Indeed, you surprise me!"

"Not at all, sir!" his step-daughter retorted. "For I happen to know that it is with your sanction that he is coming."

"Ah! I remember now; he did say something about it," answered Mr. Penruan, in a careless manner. "You will have two guests to entertain, Nelly,

quite an onerous task for you, my child; but you are a young lady of great tact and resources—*great tact.* If you should feel inclined to join me presently, Mr. Haveryng, you'll find me in the forcing-house."

So saying, he went away, leaving Eleanor, frowning, biting her lip, and musing angrily over the sneer his words conveyed. Max, who had been trying to lend a patient hearing while Mrs. Penruan detailed some of her symptoms, released himself as soon as she turned from him to caress Fan-fan, and joined her daughter.

"Your grave looks are not very complimentary to Captain Renton, Cousin Eleanor! One would almost think that you regret his coming."

"Do you believe in the doctrine of transmigration?" she asked, so abruptly that he stared and laughed.

"Not I! Does any one nowadays?"

"Yes," she replied; "I do. It is one of my greatest comforts to think that the mean, grinding, detestably wicked spirit of John Penruan may be looking at me through the medium of the horse I call Ursa Minor. It is but a foolish fancy, perhaps, but the quadruped and the human animal are so much alike—each so craftily watching their opportunity to wound me to the death, that I cannot help cherishing it!"

Max drew her arm through his, and led her onto the terrace, to which the long, French casements opened.

"My dear coz, I don't like to hear you talk in this strain; it will end in making you hard and unwomanly."

"Do not years of wrong-doing and oppression make all of us so?" she retorted.

"I think not; at least, not always. And you, with your youth and beauty, your quick appreciation of all that is good and lovely, must not degenerate into anything unfeminine!"

Eleanor's lips began to relax, but she sighed impatiently.

"It is so easy for outsiders to talk; and I dare say, in years to come, if you hear of me as a shrewish, disagreeable, strong-minded woman, you will shake your head with the rest, and say that it is the natural result of giving way to my ill-humors in my youth. No one will take the trouble to lift the curtain and ascertain what made me thus!"

"But, Eleanor, the capricious moods of Mr. Penruan must not be allowed to affect the whole course of your life," Max remonstrated. "You take too much heed of them; you let them harass you, when they really are not worth notice."

"Are they not? Yet do you think he is a pleasant person to live with?" she asked with a glance at the arm on which the marks of his violence were still visible.

"By no means!" Max answered. "On the contrary, I feel that, under any circumstances, I should not agree with him long; for which reason I have hesitated about accepting his invitation. Still, if compelled to be an inmate of his house, I would do my best to avoid clashing with him."

"For instance, you would not make bitter retorts, nor sting him with puny sarcasms every time he plays the hypocrite," said Eleanor, sighing again. "And you are right; I do but aggravate my annoyances by taking this course; but my spirit rises against the man! I cannot like—I cannot respect him; and, of late, the patience I used to exert has failed me—quite failed me."

"I wish I could help, or advise you to some purpose," said Max, kindly.

"Thanks; but unless you knew all, it would be impossible; and although we have drifted somehow into very confidential intimacy, I don't feel justified in telling you a long story, to the prejudice of your host."

"Neither should I like to hear it," was the candid reply; "for reviving old grievances is not the way to get rid of the present ones. I'd rather help you to make light of your troubles, and comfort yourself with the recollection that every cloud has a silver lining."

"Ay; but we don't see that lining till the storm has burst, and the lightning has scathed us!" she reminded him.

"How hopelessly you talk!" Max exclaimed; and Eleanor burst into a laugh, as she glanced at his grave face.

"And how romantically, eh? You will begin to think that my trials must be terrible indeed, if they compel me to talk so like a tragedy queen! Suppose I take your advice for awhile, and banish them from my thoughts. I ought to be very happy, for am I not, as you just told me, young and—what else was it?—oh, beautiful; the word is yours, Mr. Max, not mine, remember; and am I not to be dowered with forty thousand pounds if I marry with the consent of my guardians? Did not Mr. Penruan give you this last little morsel of information as soon as you arrived at the Abbey?"

She looked at Max so keenly that he was rather confused, but he answered readily enough, "Mr. Penruan said something about your being handsomely dowered the first day I dined here. I noticed it because he added that to the man who was so fortunate as to win your affections, you would be a treasure in yourself. I was pleased to hear him do you such justice."

"A treasure in myself!" Eleanor repeated. "Oh, if I were!" and when next he glanced at her, he found that she was weeping. Without appearing to notice these signs of an emotion he could not comprehend, he drew her on, and began expatiating on the scenery; either comparing it with that of America, or talking of the splendid tropical flowers that grew around his dwelling there, until she had regained her composure.

By this time they had wandered as far as the cliffs, and Max pointed out the spot from whence he must have fallen.

"This reminds me," cried Eleanor, as she seated herself on a mound of wild thyme, "that I questioned one of my servants, a woman from St. Erne, about your widow, and she says that Mrs. Rayne was merely staying at her uncle's for the benefit of her health, which had been affected by family troubles, and was not likely to come here again."

Max thanked her for the information, but made no comment upon it, although Eleanor looked as if she would have liked to know why he had testified such extraordinary interest in the relict of the dissolute Tom Rayne. So the conversation turned somehow upon Charles Renton, whose arrival would probably take place on the morrow.

"We have known Charlie ever since he and I were children together, romping about the knees of my own dear father," said Eleanor. "But we lost sight of each other after papa's health obliged him to live in a warmer climate; and when we came back to England, it was difficult to recognize in the tall, soldierly young man, my old playmate."

"I was very favorably impressed with Captain Renton," Max observed.

"He is a general favorite, unfortunately for himself," was the reply, "for his social qualities induced him to enter the army—the worst of all professions for a young man who has nothing but his pay."

"Is he so poor?" exclaimed her auditor.

"Yes. His father was extravagant, and the son pays the penalty. What property remained at the death of Mr. Renton, Charlie gave up to the creditors, and left himself nothing but his commission."

"He did right," said Max promptly.

"Yes," said Eleanor—"quite right;" but there was such a sorrowful inflection in her voice, that Max began to seek for the reason.

"You commend him, and yet you speak as if you regretted what he has done!"

"Do I? Perhaps I was thinking of something else. You have not seen the Logan, or Rocking Stone, yet, Mr. Haveryng. What say you to riding with me to view it this afternoon?"

"I shall be delighted, on condition that you do not ride Ursa Minor."

"Then we must be content to jog along on the steady old ponies that draw mamma's phaeton when she exerts herself sufficiently to go out; for Mr. Penruan permits no one to bestride his own horse, and he will not keep one for me."

"Let us have the ponies, by all means," said Max. "Then I can enjoy the landscape, without being in mortal terror for your safety."

Eleanor laughed, and went away, to put on her habit, and ask the housekeeper to pack some luncheon in the haversack, with which she invested her companion. The ride proved a delightful one; for as soon as they had emerged from the grounds of the Abbey, the beautiful and vivacious girl cast care to the winds, and gave herself up to the enjoyment of the hour. Nor was it until they were walking their tired steeds up the avenue, at the close of the excursion, that the shadow began to settle down upon her brows once more.

"It has been a most enjoyable day," said Max. "I shall often look back upon it when I am once more quietly domiciled at Aquas Dolces."

"Do not speak of it, lest I learn to envy you the power of running away from Penruan whenever you please."

"If I do possess the power, I am in no hurry to exercise it," was the smiling retort. "It will be a black day in my calendar when I am obliged to say a long farewell to the Belle of Penruan, the kind coz who has made my stay here such a pleasant one."

"Shall you remain with us for the summer, as Mr. Penruan proposes?" asked Eleanor, leaning over her pony's neck to pat his head.

"What does *la belle* say about it?" Max gayly queried, in his turn. "Shall I be in the way if I do?"

"I don't understand you," she replied, so coldly, that, fearing to offend her by a more pointed allusion to Captain Renton, he explained away his unlucky speech.

"I should have said, 'Am I likely to prove a bore to you? Mr. Penruan has inflicted on you the office of entertaining me, and I can fancy how fatiguing such a task must sometimes prove."

Eleanor did not immediately reply, and finding this, Max added, "You may be quite frank with me, my dear cousin. You will not offend me by saying that such a lengthened visit will be too great a trial of your good nature."

Still Eleanor did not speak till Max Haveryng had leaped from his horse, and was holding up his arms to assist her in dismounting. Then looking steadily into his face, although hers was hot with blushes, she said, "I should like you to stay, Max, if you would always be to me what you are now—a friend, a brother; but, for both our sakes, don't be persuaded or lured into falling in love with me!"

"I'm afraid," he answered, his bronzed cheek flushing, too, "that the caution would have been a useless one, if I hadn't given my heart away before I saw you."

"Is it so?" and Eleanor smiled again as if a load were taken off her spirits. "Ah, cousin Max, I shall not rest content with such a half confidence as this! You will have no peace now till you have told me more."

"Agreed," said Max, "if you promise to give me secret for secret."

But, blushing more vividly than before, the young lady gathered up her habit and ran away.

"She is a charming girl, Mr. Haveryng," said Eleanor's step-father, as the gentlemen sat together after dinner, "and will so far have her own way as to marry only where she loves!"

"Why does he tell me this?" his companion mentally inquired. "Does he think that I have been casting about to find the young lady's *cassette?* and is this to prepare me to find her and Renton engaged lovers? He might have spared himself the trouble. I am no fortune-hunter. If I had never seen Letty, I should not risk a rejection by entering the lists."

When he looked up, it was rather annoying to find that Mr. Penruan was stealthily watching him, as if trying to glean his thoughts from the expression of his features.

"I suppose, then, that if my cousin Eleanor likes her old friend Captain Renton well enough to give him her hand, her guardians will not oppose it?"

Mr. Penruan rose, and, putting his hands on the table, leaned over it to whisper his reply.

"Will you sit idly by, and suffer Renton to bear off so rich a prize? Is not your own fair home in California without a mistress? Could it have a more beautiful one than Eleanor Haydon?"

"Hang him!" mentally ejaculated the astonished Max, startled by a speech that tallied so oddly with the warning Eleanor had given. "Would he throw his step-daughter at my head—mine! a stranger, of whom, save for the fact that we are of the same blood, he knows nothing? I may be a gambler, a spendthrift—a mere impostor, as he once hinted! He has made no effort to convince himself to the contrary. And yet he invites me to carry away pretty Eleanor and her forty thousand pounds! Bah! there lies something under this which I cannot comprehend! I am not idiot enough to think that it is for the love of Max Haveryng of Aquas Dolces, that he does this. He has some sinister motive for such apparent kindness!"

"You are putting strange thoughts into my head, Mr. Penruan," he said, aloud. "Do you really advise me to propose myself as a suitor for the hand of Miss Haydon?"

"Advise? No, no!" was the hasty reply. "You mistake me. Eleanor, with all her excellent qualities, is so self-willed, that I have long ceased to interfere with her. I do not advise you, my dear Max. I only bid you act as your heart dictates. You have a comfortable competence, I suppose?"

The kinsman assented; and after a harangue, which lasted for some minutes, on the troubles and anxieties that attended property, especially house property, in England, Mr. Penruan proposed that they should join the ladies.

Eleanor was at the piano when they entered the drawing-room, and she sung at the request of Max, till Mrs. Penruan fancied that one of the notes was out of tune, and caused her to experience a nervous tremor every time it was touched. So the instrument was closed, and chess substituted; but Eleanor was too pensive and absorbed to play a good game; and the running accompaniment of her mother's fretful complaints was so depressing, that no one was sorry when the regular hour arrived for retiring.

Not feeling at all sleepy, Max resolved to go to the library, and select a book to carry with him to his own room; but when he reached the door it refused to open, and supposing that the servants had closed it for the night, he was quietly turning away, when some one approached it from within, and asked: "Is that you, Mr. Penruan?"

"No, it is I—Max Haveryng," he answered, promptly, and explained his errand. But a dead silence followed. The door was not unclosed, nor was any notice of his speech vouchsafed; and bewildered by such strange proceedings, after waiting awhile, he walked away.

As he went back to his chamber, he heard Mr. Penruan rating the men-servants for some act of neglect, and saw Eleanor and Mrs. Penruan's maid assisting that lady's languid movements, as she ascended the stairs. It was, therefore, neither of the members of the family, whom he had just left locked in the library; neither was it an intruder—as witness the question that was asked as soon as his efforts to open the door became audible to the person within.

Coupling this circumstance with what he had seen and heard on a previous day, Max was forced to the conclusion that there were inmates of the Abbey whom he was not to be permitted to know; and, by a natural sequence of ideas, he also concluded that it was one of these unknown residents in the house who had opened the panel in the wainscoting of his chamber.

Although not more curious than other men, he could not keep his thoughts from dwelling on these things, and he even pushed aside the wardrobe he had drawn across that part of the room, in order to make another examination of the wainstcot. Still, the panel defied his efforts to open it, and he was beginning to ask himself whether his eyes had not deceived him after all, when he saw something glisten in one corner of it. It was a nail driven through from the other side by some one not very expert in the use of the hammer; and Max veered back to his former opinion.

"Now do I know that I was not mistaken. This panel did open; and fearful lest I should discover how, and detect the person who made use of it, advantage has been taken of my absence to make all safe. I will ask Eleanor to-morrow if the specters of the Abbey are addicted to spirit-rapping in such a material form as hammering nails into my chamber walls."

Disappointed in procuring a book, Max opened his window, and, leaning his arms on the broad ledge, smoked and watched the moon float upward through the clear sky, till a distant clock, striking one, told him that another day had stolen upon him while he mused.

Only one more ere the precious missive from Letty would be in his possession!—and he was trying to conjecture how she would address him, and whether he should be able to find any food for hope within her letter, when a light puff of wind chilled him, and he closed his casement.

The same breeze had extinguished his candle; but Max, whose toilet was always of the simplest, did not take the trouble to search for matches. He could undress very well in the dark; and he was preparing to do so, when the handle of his door was touched by some one outside.

He listened, and was about to ask who was there; but the hand that had been laid upon it was withdrawn, and sounds followed, as if fingers were trailed along the wall, while slow steps accompanied the movement.

After the first few moments Max fancied he comprehended what this meant and smiled to himself.

"I suppose one of Mr. John Penruan's servants has been exceeding a little, and is troubled to find his way to his dormitory. I hope, for his sake, poor wretch, he has not been imbibing his master's wine."

Onward went the shuffling footsteps, then halted irresolutely; and, still with the same trailing, guiding movement of the hand, as if the person were compelled to feel his way along the passage, the steps began to return. Nearer and nearer they came, and now were accompanied by low moans, as if whoever uttered them were in such great agony or terror that he had lost all self-restraint.

Before Max could go to the assistance of this unknown personage, a voice, in a clear, sharp whisper, breathed the word, "Come, oh, come!" Whether the appeal was intended for him or not, he no longer paused to think; but, crossing his room with as little noise as possible, he cautiously opened the door and looked out.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEREIN MAX FINDS HIMSELF IN ANOTHER DILEMMA, FROM WHICH NO ONE APPEARS ABLE TO RESCUE HIM.

THE apartments Max occupied in Penruan Abbey

opened on a large square landing, and were situated on the first story of the house, above, or nearly above, the library. At his right hand lay the wide staircase, leading to the entrance-hall below; on the left was a large window, filled with stained glass, through which the moon shone faintly, and covered the oaken flooring with fantastic shadows. On the opposite side of the landing, a door, similar in position to his own, led to a corridor, containing several other suites of rooms, of which few were now furnished, save those occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Penruan and Eleanor. At the further end of the corridor another flight of stairs led to the sleeping-chambers of the servants.

Max had learned these details when his host led him through the Abbey, and he had since then carefully examined the landing for himself, with a view to ascertaining what lay on the other side of the panel he had seen opened. But all he had gleaned was this; that there was space enough between his bedroom and the outer wall for an apartment of equal size, but the entrance to it must be from some other part of the house.

It was, as we have already said, with some caution that he emerged from this apartment, for unaccountable noises, when heard at the small hours of the night, will naturally put their auditor on the defensive. He had scarcely taken a couple of steps forward, when he recoiled, for, to his inexpressible surprise, he found that Mr. Penruan was at his elbow.

It was he, in dressing-gown and slippers, who was feeling his way along the walls, and moaning so strangely; and, concluding directly that he was ill, his guest was about to address him, and offer assistance, when a ray of moonlight fell on his upturned visage, and Max perceived, by the fixed glassy eye, that he was walking in his sleep.

There is always something unearthly in the appearance of a somnambulist. His utter unconsciousness of all around him; the fearless gravity with which he passes along dangerous places; and that peculiar something in his state which seems to separate him for the time from both the waking and the sleeping world, inspires the beholder with a sentiment akin to awe. It is also certain that somnambulism never took a more painful shape than it did on this occasion; for so perturbed were the visions that had drawn Mr. Penruan from his couch, that Max longed to arouse him from them, and was only deterred by remembering to have heard that the act is often attended with bad consequences to the sleeper.

Without appearing so see him, Mr. Penruan moved on, still giving vent to low, moaning expressions of suffering, whether mental or bodily it was difficult to say. To Max he was an object for the sincerest pity; to a psychologist he would have been a curious study, for his whole bearing was that of a man who, by some mysterious and invisible power, is being influenced against his will. As if impelled by this power, which he vainly sought to resist, he walked onward, but stopped again and again to wring his hands and extend them imploringly, and repeat those mute prayers to be released.

His ghastly and contorted features, and his strange gestures, dimly visible in the shadowy light, ended in impressing Max so unpleasantly, that the young man felt very much inclined to retreat, and, locking himself in his chamber, leave his host to his own resources. But then the question arose, how far would it be right to do this? It was quite possible that such scenes were of nightly occurrence, and that the somnambulist always regained his couch in safety; but, on the other hand, who could say that he would not incur some peril which might be prevented by heedfully watching him?

No one else in the Abbey gave token of having been disturbed by Mr. Penruan's nocturnal ramble; and to traverse the whole length of the corridor, and awaken some of the servants, would be to risk arousing his lady and Eleanor, and creating no end of alarm. So, as the task of watching over him seemed to have devolved on Max Haveryng, the latter rather unwillingly accepted it, and continued to move slowly after his dreamy kinsman.

In a little while Mr. Penruan grew calmer, and, drawing his hand across his brow with the air of one exhausted by a long struggle, he began walking toward the door leading toward his bedroom, and Max to congratulate himself upon the same.

But ere he reached it, a voice, low, yet distinct, arrested him.

The same whispered words, the same imperious "Come! come!" which Max had heard before he quitted his chamber, were now repeated, and the unhappy man, writhing, groaning, like a creature possessed, staggered once more toward the stairs.

Max was now fairly startled. It was plain that he was not—as he had been supposing—the only watchful creature in the Abbey, or the only person cognizant of Mr. Penruan's somnambulism. More than this, he felt tolerably certain that the voice which so violently affected this gentleman was not raised to induce him to go quietly back to rest. On the contrary, advantage was being taken of his somnolent state to lead him elsewhere. Some chord, cleverly struck, was influencing the dreamer, whose ear, dulled to all other sounds, had still been keenly sensitive to that imperious summons.

And now the question arose for what purpose was some one or other practicing upon the excited brain of the dreamer, and who was this person? Eleanor Haydon—could she, with all her aversion to her stepfather, stoop to such acts as these?

Anyhow, Max was too practical to attribute the sounds he heard to supernatural agency, and he was also too honorable in all his own dealings not to resent anything in the shape of trickery, whether attempted on himself or his kinsman. And, satisfied that the voice had proceeded from the direction of the staircase, he immediately followed Mr. Penruan's uncertain steps, for the twofold purpose of pouncing upon the concealed speaker, and denouncing, in the strongest terms, such unworthy conduct.

Keeping carefully in the shadow himself, he was soon able to see that about half-way down the flight of wide, oaken steps, there was a recess, originally intended for a statue. Within this it was quite possible for any person of average size to hide; and Max, whose sight was unusually keen, felt almost positive that he could detect the outlines of a figure, dressed in flowing garments, standing motionless within it.

While he gazed, Mr. Penruan began to descend the stairs, still moving as if drawn thither against his will; and now Max was no longer in doubt, for he distinctly saw the dusky, feminine figure flit down from the niche, and glide on before the sleep-walker, repeating the imperious summons. Too impetuous to keep back any longer, the young man sprung past Mr. Penruan, who was clinging to the balustrades, and, with outstretched arms, went leaping toward the intruder, who was slowly retreating across the hall.

But as soon as his tall form came fully in sight, this ghostly visitant gave proof of being accessible to mortal terrors; for, panting with alarm, she immediately began to rush down the nearest passage, at a speed which Max, though agile enough, found it no easy task to emulate.

His angry command to her to stop only seemed to quicken her movements; and ere he could prevent it, she had slipped the bolts of a door, and darted through, with him in hot pursuit.

The rush of cold air told him, ere he reached this portal, that it gave access to the court-yard behind the offices; and here he thought he should surely bring the unknown to bay, for Mr. Penruan's fears lest his grooms should secretly help themselves to anything from the stable at night, induced him to have the keys of all the outer gates delivered into his own care.

But Max forgot that the pursued had here the immense advantage over the pursuer of knowing the locality; and by the time he had stumbled over a stable pail, and discovered that the tall object toward which he hastened was not a female, but a pump, he had the mortification of seeing the unknown glide back into the house, having successfully evaded him by drawing back into a dark corner.

The door closed behind her with a dull thud, and, for a moment, Max believed that she had retorted upon him by locking him out; but it yielded to his touch, and, with some difficulty, he made his way back to the principal staircase. Mr. Penruan was no longer there. Released of the presence of his tormentress, he had returned to his chamber; and his guest, very much puzzled and dissatisfied, threw himself on his bed, and snatched a few hours' repose.

While he dressed himself on the morrow, he endeavored to come to some decision as to the course he should himself take respecting this night's work. The most straightforward way would certainly be to go to the Squire, and tell him all that had come under his notice.

But then, Mr. Penruan was a peculiar man, and might act upon the information with a virulence that Max would scarcely care to evoke.

Would it not be wiser, and even kinder, to satisfy himself first whether Eleanor was the culprit, and ascertain from the young lady her reasons for working upon the excited brain of her step-father. If sheer mischief dictated the act, surely a quiet but earnest remonstrance would make her aware of the actual cruelty of such conduct.

Then a doubt arose as to whether any interference on the part of a comparative stranger ought to be attempted in this most extraordinary household—whether it would not be more prudent to be blind and deaf to all that transpired at Penruan Abbey, while enjoying the hospitality of its owner and the goodwill of the rest of the inmates.

Finally, Haveryng, unable to arrive at any decision, went down to breakfast, half-inclined to let circumstances shape his course for him.

As he descended the stairs he glanced into the recess, and descried a scrap of something black clinging to a nail that had once supported a bracket. This scrap Max took the trouble to pause and secure. It was a morsel of black lace, torn from a woman's dress; and the suspicions he had been entertaining of Eleanor were greatly strengthened by this circumstance.

When he entered the breakfast-parlor, the Squire, whose visage looked strangely wan and pinched, uttered a curt good-morrow, and buried himself in the money article of a local paper. But Mrs. Penruan, who had made the unusual exertion of rising early, beckoned Max to her side. She was still harping on the croquet party. The romantic idea of being borne in a litter or palanquin, through a crowd of admiring and commiserating visitors, had taken hold of her imagination; and, with childish pertinacity, she continued to dwell upon it, glancing wistfully at her husband while she talked, although his stern, unsympathizing face proved that, if he heard, he had not the smallest intention of complying with her wishes. Max found it difficult to reconcile Mr. Penruan's overweening anxiety about his lady's health with this unwillingness to oblige her.

"I have been looking at my striped silk," she murmured; "and it really would make up into the loveliest costume imaginable! It would be a very trying ordeal for me, I know; and Mr. Penruan says he will not hear of my making such very great exertions. Is not that what you said, John, dear? But I feel that I ought to nerve myself to it, for Eleanor's sake, dear child; she sees no society. My health makes complete prisoners of both of us. Mr. Penruan and I often regret that it should be so—don't we, John?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, speaking with provoking deliberation; "Mr. Penruan once proved his regret for my secluded life by reminding me, when I complained of it, that I am permitted to go to church whenever I feel disposed to walk there!"

The Squire glanced at the speaker over his newspaper, but gave no other token of having heard her sarcastic speech; and Mrs. Penruan went on: "I think my maid shall write to my medical man, tell him what I propose doing, and ask him if he cannot send me a draught that will compose and sustain me. Nothing nauseous, of course; he knows how I detest unpleasant medicines. Then I could lie quite still in a darkened room till the last moment, and need not disturb myself, except to have the dress tried on. Why don't you speak, Eleanor? You might say whether you can suggest any better arrangement?"

"*Cui bono?* What's the use?" muttered her daughter, below her breath. "I was waiting to hear the rest of your plans, mamma. You have not said who is to issue the invitations, decorate the rooms, arrange the dessert, help to make the jellies, and receive the guests? I suppose all these items must be taken into consideration?"

"Don't be unfeeling, child!" sighed Mrs. Penruan, looking for her smelling-bottle. "How can I be expected to attend to things of this description in my dreadful state of nervous debility? If I make the exertion of appearing at all, it will certainly prostrate me for days!"

"Of course it would," growled the Squire, irritably; "and you *must not* attempt it! Only a madwoman would think of such folly!"

Mrs. Penruan sunk back on her cushions with her handkerchief to her eyes, whimpering something about "for Eleanor's sake;" but she dared not say more while her spouse looked so irascible.

"Poor mamma!" said her daughter, caressing the delicate white hand of the invalid lady. "How grievous that all your heroic resolutions should be made in vain! And Mr. Haveryng, too! What a disappointment for him, that he is not to see the *elite* of the country gathered at our cheerful and hospitable dwelling!"

"I shall survive it," said Max, coolly, as the Squire snatched up his papers and went away, slamming the door behind him. "I'm not sure that I should shine at such an affair; and if Mr. Penruan took it into his head to introduce me to his lady guests in the same style as he did to his friend, the lieutenant—that is, as my kinsman from the gold-diggings—I should long to hide myself; for I find that the notion here is that there are but two classes of people in California—the miners, and those who prey upon them."

"Your courage will not be put to the test," Eleanor answered; "for croquet parties entail expenses that would make Mr. Penruan tear his hair."

"If you have been putting that idea into his head," cried her mother, crossly, "I do not wonder at his reluctance to give one. I wish you would curb that shrewish tongue of yours, Eleanor! I thought it was your fault in some way."

"Then your thought was an unjust one," was the calm reply. "I should have been only too glad, mamma, to further any scheme that would give you something more pleasant to dwell upon than your own ailments. In self-defense, I must also tell *you*, Mr. Haveryng, that Mr. Penruan never wasted his money in entertaining his neighbors; neither does he give a seat at his table to a relative without a *motive* for the civility!"

She spoke with so much significance, that Max followed her to the window to which she now retreated.

"Are you sure that you are justified in what you have been saying?" he asked. "What motive but a good-natured one can my kinsman have for his kindness to me?"

"I do not know, although I have my suspicions," was all Eleanor could be induced to say; and the Squire just then re-entering the room, all further discussion of the topic became impossible.

Mr. Penruan complained of headache and lassitude, the results, though he knew it not, of his somnambulism; and after fidgeting about for some time, and peevishly rejecting all the remedies that were suggested, he went away to vent his spleen on his workmen. His lady was not sorry to be rid of him, for she wanted to examine some fashion plates, and while she debated with her maid whether the new azuline would harmonize well with her gay Bengalese *robe de soir*, Eleanor and Max quitted the house, and sauntered to their favorite haunt—the rose-garden.

The opportunity was too good to be lost, and Max threw out a bold sally directly they found themselves alone.

"Did you sleep soundly last night, cousin Eleanor?"

"Yes," she answered carelessly, as she stooped over a budding crimson gacqueminot. "Why do you ask? Did you think I should be too tired to rest well?"

Was this a deliberate falsehood that she uttered so glibly? Ere Max could utter another query, she looked up, surprised at his silence.

"Your own eyes are as heavy, Mr. Haveryng, as if your slumbers had not been peaceful ones. Were they broken by dreams, or what ails you?"

"Are you really ignorant that I watched, during a considerable portion of the night, or are you playing upon my credulity, Miss Haydon?"

Eleanor dropped the bud she had just gathered, and began to survey the speaker curiously.

"Cousin Max, I calculate, as they say in your country, that you must have *seen something!*"

"I am not going to contradict you," he answered, dryly.

The young lady stifled a laugh.

"Then I was right; you have been honored with a visit from one of the specters of the Abbey. In what shape? Do tell me! Was it a feminine one—white or gray? Wore it a head on its shoulders, or tucked under its arm? Now, don't disappoint me by saying that you saw nothing more than a spectral face, or a shadow hand, or the tilting of a table; or I shall be quite provoked. I have so longed to know some one who has really and truly beheld a *bona fide* ghost!"

"Perhaps I cannot tell you more than you already know," said Max, with a keen look at her amused face.

"But I know nothing; how should I? Are you only joking? Was it but a dream, after all?"

"Certainly not; and it would tax all your ingenuity, lady fair, to make me think it one."

"I shall not try; at all events, till you have given me the fullest particulars," Eleanor replied. "Let us sit down here, and pray tell me everything you saw, thought, or imagined. I am rather skeptical, but still I promise not to laugh, if I can help it."

"You speak as if you really are in ignorance of what I mean," Max told her; "and yet I think you played the specter yourself."

Eleanor stared at him, laughed heartily, and then grew very serious.

"Now I feel sure you must have been in earnest, or you would not look at me so oddly!" she exclaimed. "Pray tell me why you bring such an absurd accusation against me? On my honor, I never quitted my chamber after I bade mamma good-night at the door, until I was aroused this morning by the breakfast-bell."

"If I must believe you—" Max began.

"If! Is it possible that you doubt my word?" she retorted, so indignantly, that he hastened to apologize.

"I have done you injustice, my dear cousin. I ought to have known from the beginning that you would not be guilty of such unfeminine, such ungenerous conduct!"

"Never mind me," cried Eleanor, with impatience, "but tell me all."

"Is Mr. Penruan in the habit of walking in his sleep?" Max queried.

"I don't know," she answered, astonished at the abruptness of the question. "What signifies if he is? Surely you do not mean to imply that *he* is your ghost? I thought you said it was of my own sex."

"To the best of my belief," Max assented. It was while watching Mr. Penruan, for fear he should wander away, or unconsciously do himself some injury, that I saw the apparition of which I spoke."

An incredulous smile began to play around Eleanor's mouth.

"The shadows of night are deceptive, Monsieur Max. Are you quite, *quite* sure that it was not the portrait of one of your ancestresses that you mistook for a spiritual visitant?"

"You forget," he retorted, "that I do not deal in spiritualism; but if I did, I should still inquire whether our ancestresses leave such traces of their presence as this?"

He drew from his pocket-book the scrap of lace, and laid it in her hand.

"It is not mine!" she answered, after carefully examining it. "I have none of that pattern. Where did you find it? Pray tell me all the particulars!"

Max now related his nocturnal adventure from beginning to end, Eleanor listening with the greatest attention.

"It is very strange!" she said, when he paused. "I cannot understand it at all. There is but one person in the Abbey whom I can suspect, and she would not dare—No, no; it cannot be! I will question her; but I feel positive what her answer will be; unless," she added, with an air of relief, "she, too, was watching over Mr. Penruan's safety."

"In that case, why fly me?"

"Surprise at your unexpected appearance might have induced her to do that," was the reply.

"But why was this woman endeavoring to lead Mr. Penruan to the lower part of the house, instead of simply guiding him back to his own room?"

As Eleanor could not answer this query, he put to her another.

"Who is the person on whom your suspicions have fallen?"

"An old and attached servant, who has been with us so many years, and served us so faithfully, that I feel ashamed to doubt her good intentions, even if appearances are against her. However, I will speak to her about this extraordinary affair, and you shall know the result."

"What is this woman's name?" asked Max, suddenly.

"Morison. She is a widow, who, losing her own child in its infancy, came to nurse me in mine, and has lived with us ever since, in one capacity or another."

"I should like to see her," said Max. "I fancy I could identify my ghost by her hight and figure."

"You shall see her," said Eleanor; "but there is something so ludicrous in the idea of our reserved, staid old nurse playing such pranks as you describe, that I cannot help laughing when I think of it. Have you said anything to Mr. Penruan about his midnight ramble?"

"Not yet," was the answer. "Shall I?"

"Just as you please. It may be as well to warn him that he walks in his sleep, although, were the case mine, I should prefer to be left in ignorance. Only imagine the horror of waking and finding oneself on the roof of the Abbey, or pacing the edge of the cliffs! Do you know the opera of 'La Sonnambula,' my cousin?"

"I saw it once at San Francisco, and shall never forget the thrill of horror that seized me when *Amina* appeared!"

"I am not surprised," Eleanor replied. "Of all the tricks our brain plays us, sleep-walking is certainly the worst!" and she shuddered as she spoke.

Eleanor had nothing to conceal. Of that Max now felt so convinced that he wondered at himself for having suspected her at all. His remorse for the injustice he had done this young girl made him more eager than ever to please her, and gave an additional gentleness to his manner, that was always tender and chivalrous to her sex.

Instead of sauntering away that afternoon to smoke beneath the trees, and dream of Mistress Letty, he devoted himself to the amusement of his fair cousin. She could not help feeling gratified by his attentions, and their intimacy insensibly took a more confidential tone than it had hitherto worn, for how could she resist the frank, sunny good-humor of her chivalrous companion, or be sad while he was so gay?

That day the formal Mr. Haveryng was entirely dropped, never to be resumed, and when heavy rains drove the young people into the house, they brought with them such light hearts, and such a fund of mirth and drollery, that Mrs. Penruan forgot her nerves, and was seduced into laughing with them.

"If I had but a guitar," said Max, when Eleanor had been saucily questioning him about the Spanish ladies of South America, "I would teach you to dance a bolero, and rattle the castanets, like the dark-skinned donzell as you presume to quiz."

"Could not we make shift with a banjo?" the young lady demanded.

"Ay; but where could we get one?" queried Eleanor.

"I used to play the guitar a little," said Mrs. Penruan. "I nearly learned all my notes when I was young."

Some eager questioning elicited that the instrument on which the lady had made her musical essays was still in existence, and, after a good deal of searching, it was disinterred.

Max mended the broken strings, tuned it, thrummed an accompaniment to the Spanish songs he taught his pretty pupil, and then persuaded her to learn the steps of the graceful national dances in which he was himself an adept.

Her bright eyes glittering with excitement, her glowing face a deeper crimson than usual, she was coquettishly waltzing round and round Max, when the door opened, and the Squire and a stranger appeared.

No one was disturbed by their entrance, for Mrs. Penruan was amused by watching the dancers, while they were absorbed in their performance, for Max had just struck a fuller chord on his guitar, and sunk on one knee at the feet of the lady, rapidly giving her directions the while.

"Now you must avert your face and look coy, Eleanor. Stay; your attitude is too stiff. Ah! that's better! Now you yield me your hand; no, no, not so coldly; give it to me as if you loved me. And now I kiss it, to slow music, in token that we are reconciled."

"Oh, Max! what an un-English proceeding!" exclaimed his laughing partner.

"Not at all," was the merry retort. "It's only the old, old story set with variations. Now I rise, and we express our mutual felicity in a valse movement. One, two, three; one, two, three."

But as they were whirling round the room to the music of their own voices, Eleanor caught a glimpse of the figures at the doorway, and hastily disengaged herself from the embrace of her partner.

"Charlie!" she murmured, in overwhelming confusion.

"Captain Renton, by Jove!" exclaimed Max.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

ALTHOUGH neither of the waltzers felt conscious of having done aught of which they had reason to be ashamed, Captain Renton's appearance at such a critical moment was certainly embarrassing. But Eleanor caught the malicious smile on Mr. Penruan's thin lips, and recovered her composure directly. It was she who was the first to advance, and, with extended hand, greet the new-comer.

"You are very welcome, Captain Renton. We heard that you were on your way, but feared that the weather would prevent your joining us until to-morrow. Mamma, here is your old friend, Charles Renton!"

Max looked wonderingly at the speaker. She had grown very pale, and all her animation had vanished. She was no longer the wayward, impetuous creature who had alternately vexed and pleased him, but the graceful, stately young lady of polished society giving the tips of her fingers to the guest, and blending with her courtesy a degree of reserve he had never seen her assume before.

With equal frigidity, Captain Renton bowed over the hand he just touched with his own, and, then dropping it, crossed the room to Mrs. Penruan, whom he accosted with all the cordiality of friendship.

"I am so glad to see you looking better, my dear madam."

Mrs. Penruan shook her head dolefully.

"You are very kind to say so, but I don't think I am any better, Charlie—Captain Renton, I should have said, but it is so difficult to forget that I knew you when you were a little curly-headed boy, romping gayly with my own children in our bungalow at Benares."

"Don't try to forget it," he answered. "It is pleasant to find that some one retains a kindly recollection of those pleasant old times."

"Indeed we often talk about you, Eleanor and I—" the lady began; but her daughter frowned and interposed.

"Mamma, you have neglected to introduce our cousin, Max. Captain Renton, Mr. Haveryng."

The young officer moved a step from Mrs. Penruan's couch, and drew himself up. There was a resentful look in his eyes as he bowed to Max, but he was too completely the gentleman to let his annoyance be visible in his manner.

"I believe I have had the honor of meeting Mr. Haveryng before, although I was not then made acquainted with the relationship of which Miss Haydon speaks. A cousin, I think you said?"

"Max is Mr. Penruan's cousin," the young lady explained.

"Max?" Captain Renton repeated, inquiringly. "Oh! I beg your pardon. I did not quite understand. You mean Mr. Haveryng?"

"Eleanor and this young kinsman of mine are such very good friends, that they have done away with all such formalities," said the Squire in his ear; and Charles Renton set his teeth firmly together, but made no reply.

"I am so glad you have come," Mrs. Penruan observed. "You are just in time for the croquet party we were thinking of giving. It's a sort of thing I'm scarcely equal to, but for Eleanor's sake and Mr. Haveryng's—did you speak, dear John?"

The Squire had muttered something so very like an oath that he did not care to repeat it; but, seating himself in an easy-chair, he turned to Eleanor: "Pray don't let us interrupt your dancing. I dare say Captain Renton will be as pleased to see it as I shall."

"You are very kind!" she answered, ironically. "I am quite ready to practice that last step again. What does Max say?"

"Max says that he shall be very glad if Captain Renton will take his place," the Californian gayly replied. "I cannot do justice to my partner when I have to play as well as waltz."

"After all, I believe I am too tired," said Eleanor, leaning back on her seat and fanning herself. "I am sorry, though, to disappoint you of your anticipated amusement, Mr. Penruan—very sorry!"

Captain Renton took the fan out of the young lady's hand, and as he cooled her burning cheeks with it, he contrived to say a few words unheard by the rest.

"I thought you never waltzed, Miss Haydon?"

"Did you?" she answered, coldly.

"The last time—I'm afraid I must say *the only time*, we met at a ball in this neighborhood, you refused me your hand for a round dance on that very plea."

"You have an excellent memory, Captain Renton, for everything but—a friend's advice."

"I understand the taunt," he replied, making an effort to curb his angry emotion. "You are alluding to your having counseled me not to come to Penruan again. Had you told me why you said this—had you frankly admitted that it was because the heart I sought to win was given to another—I should have obeyed you. As it is—"

"As it is," she repeated, "you come here to pain yourself, and misunderstand me, as you have often done before. Is it wise to do this? is it generous?"

"Am I, then, positively hateful to you?" he demanded. "Time was, Eleanor, that you liked me well enough—that you always had a smile for me when I came, and a tear when I left you."

"Yes, when we were foolish children," she answered, with forced gayety. "But, my dear Captain Renton, you must be ridiculously sentimental to recall such nonsense! If I felt inclined, I could repeat to you scores of such reminiscences. Don't you remember the halcyon hours when we ate bon-bons together, and I cried because you had the largest orange? Charming recollections!"

"Of course they are not so entertaining as it must be to dance boleros with Mr. Haveryng, and listen to his wonderful adventures, or the music of his guitar!"

"Max is a very agreeable companion," said Eleanor, aggravatingly.

"Who dares doubt that, if he has succeeded in making Miss Haydon forget the modest dignity of an English lady, and suffer herself to be posed in attitudes by his audacious hands?"

Eleanor rose, haughtily exclaiming, "Sir! Who gives you the right to censure my conduct? You are too officious, Captain Renton."

She swept away with the air of an offended empress, and the young officer, with difficulty retaining his self-command, turned to converse with Mr. Penruan till the hour for retiring.

"Don't let my early habits influence you young men, if you would prefer to stay up a little longer and have a smoke," the Squire said, with unusual urbanity. "You have your own cigars, of course, and the butler can brew you some whisky-toddy, if you wish it."

Much to his satisfaction, the latter offer was declined, and, bidding them good-night, he went away, leaving Max and Charles Renton together.

It was by no means an amicable face that the latter turned toward his companion when the Squire had closed the door, but Max was picking up some vesuvians he had let fall, and did not perceive it.

"Mr. Haveryng, I have such an insuperable objection to being duped," were the words that made him look up, wonderingly, "such a decided aversion to hypocrisy in any form, that we had better come to an understanding at once."

"By all means," said Max, readily, "for, at the present moment, I don't comprehend what you are aiming at."

"I'll soon explain myself. When I met you in town, you pretended ignorance of the Penruan family. You did your best to draw me on, and learn my position with regard to my friends, and it is plain that you have shaped your own course accordingly. These may be Californian tactics, sir; these may be among the clever dodges on which your countrymen pride themselves; but permit me to tell you that they don't recommend themselves to English gentlemen."

"If I did not tell you that I am related to John Penruan—" Max began, but Captain Renton immediately stopped him.

"You need not trouble yourself to make any half explanations. I have seen quite enough to know that you have contrived to ingratiate yourself both with the Squire and Miss Haydon. You have gained your ends, never mind how dishonorably; that's no one's affair but your own, as I dare say you'll tell me; and it is not worth while to go through the farce of making lame apologies to me that mean nothing."

"Apologies, indeed!" cried Max, irately. "Why should I make any to you for what I do?"

"Why, indeed! I should as soon think of asking your pardon for calling you a hypocritical blackguard, and regretting that I cannot very well thrash you as long as you are under this roof."

"Thrash *me!*" and the lithe, broad-shouldered Californian flung back his head, and surveyed his antagonist defiantly. But his good-humor soon returned.

"This is rather tall talk, isn't it, Captain Renton? I'm not answerable to you, I believe, for anything I do; but if I had really given you cause to feel aggrieved, I should not hesitate to acknowledge it."

"I am very well aware," the captain stiffly interposed, "that you have the advantage, and I have no doubt you intend to keep it. After so much diplomacy as you must have exercised, I expect nothing else."

"Is it because Miss Haydon and I are on friendly terms that you find such fault with me?" queried Max; and Charles Renton leaped toward him, angrily, exclaiming:

"How dare you take her name on your lips? How dare you boast to me of the favor she shows you?"

But the hand that was extended to clutch Max by the throat was seized in a grasp of iron, and firmly put back.

"Enough, Captain Renton, enough! I'm not going to disgrace myself by brawling with my kinsman's guest in my kinsman's house; neither am I going to expose myself to further insult by offering to you again the explanations you have already refused. I'll wish you good-night."

And Max stalked away, very much annoyed at the change that had come over the pleasant gentlemanly young fellow, whom he had been so eager to know more intimately.

"He is a conceited fool," was his first decision, "who begrudges me one of pretty Eleanor's kind looks. Yet no; I judge him too harshly. If he loves her, how can I wonder that he feels maddened by the coldness of the reception she gave him? Does she return his affection? There was not a sign of it in her manner; on the contrary, she treated him as if he were an unwelcome intruder. Is it caprice that actuates her, or is she really as indifferent to him as she appears?"

Then Max recollected the advice Mr. Penruan had given him with regard to his step-daughter, and reddened rather consciously. Was it possible that Eleanor was ready to be won, and by him?

But this thought was banished as soon as it arose. She was too frank, too sisterly in her regard, to entertain deeper feelings, and declaring to himself that she was an enigma, Max went to sleep.

On the morrow he and Captain Renton treated each other with a politeness so elaborate that Mr. Penruan chuckled to himself and rubbed his hands pleasantly, while Eleanor glanced under her long eyelashes, first at one, and then at the other, and bit her full, red lip. As soon as breakfast was over, she mentioned her own intention of spending the morning in the fairy cave, but neither of the gentlemen offered to accompany her thither. Captain Renton had already made arrangements for a day's

fishing, and Max said something about keeping an engagement with the old lieutenant, who had offered to introduce him to some of the caverns on the coast, that could only be entered from a boat.

And so the party separated, Max carrying the lightest heart of them all, for was he not to have Letty's note this evening—that little missive on which he built such extravagant hopes?

The lieutenant proved a most entertaining companion, and the vigorous arm of the young Californian pulled the light skiff into some of the fairest caves that lay upon that wild and rocky shore. But as the evening drew on he grew so abstracted, so restless, that at last the old man cried, good-humoredly, "There, go along with you, Mr. Haverynge; my stories are wasted on you to-night. The next time you come, bring the *belle* of Penruan with you, and, my life on't, I shall get a more patient hearing."

But Max had no desire to return to the Abbey until he had been to Dan Calynack's cottage, and, excusing himself to his host on the plea that he had a headache, he strolled away to St. Erne, and lingered on the most secluded part of the beach, till the sun went down, and the hour arrived at which Esther bade him seek the letter.

As he passed round the end of the cottage, some one within flung a handful of dry wood on the fire. It blazed up brightly, and in that brief moment he caught a glimpse of a figure in deep mourning standing on the hearth.

It was Letty herself, and, half wild with joy, he bounded toward the porch. Here the shadows were so deep that he did not perceive that a man was crouching within it in a listening attitude, until he came in violent contact with him.

Before he could apologize, this man had picked himself up, and silently walked away; but as he went, Max recognized the stooping figure, the stealthy, hesitating step, and knew that it was Mr. Penruan.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH MAX HAVERYNG IS MADE BOTH VERY GLAD AND VERY SORRY.

Scarcely pausing to think how strange it was that the Lord of Penruan should be crouching like a spy at the door of a poor fisherman's cottage, Max lifted the latch and hastily entered. Letty had heard the approaching footsteps, and retreated toward the inner room, as if intending to conceal herself; but he was too quick for her. Ere she could carry out her intention, he was by her side—her hands seized in his own, and carried to his lips. Then in his sunny eyes there shone such delight at the renconter, that, after one vain endeavor to meet his look steadily and coldly, her face flushed and drooped, and she no longer attempted to withdraw her fluttering fingers.

"I did not hope for this!" Max exclaimed, when he recovered speech. "I was more than half afraid that I should not even find the promised letter here! How good you were to come! How shall I thank you for it?"

"Do not thank me at all!" she answered, trying to speak with chilly reserve. "I did not intend to see you, Mr. Haveryng. In fact, if I had been sure that you would come here to-night, I should have delayed my visit."

"Don't say if!" Max interposed. "You ought to know me better than to imply a doubt of my coming. You might have been certain that I should be too anxious to hear from you to stay away."

"And yet what could be more probable than that you had other and pleasanter engagements?" she murmured, with a little bitterness audible in her accents.

"Nothing could have been half so delightful as seeing you; no engagement would have kept me from coming here to-night," said Max, with such earnestness that she blushed with pleasure, but still persisted in speaking frigidly.

"If I had been sure of this I should not have stopped to see Dan, although I have a message for him from my aunt Esther, who has hurt her ankle, and cannot make the journey."

"Then you were yourself the bearer of the promised letter. Pray give it to me!"

"Nay, it is not necessary! I can repeat to you the few words it contained."

But Max made a dissenting gesture. "Pray do not if they are harsh ones. But if they are destined to pain me, when I read them presently, let me be able to recall some look you have given me, some kind speech you have made, and so take heart of grace again."

"But, indeed, I must not say more than that I am grieved if I have misjudged you!" Letty sorrowfully replied. "You will find as much in the note—it lies on yonder table; and now I have only to bid you good-night, and repeat my sincere wishes for your welfare."

"And you are going already?"

"Certainly!" she answered. "Farewells are nearly always painful, Mr. Haveryng. Why, then, prolong them?"

"And you mean me to understand that I am not to see you again?"

She nodded assent, and busied herself in arranging the folds of the large dark shawl that had been wrapped around her.

"But why have you come to such a decision? Why do you refuse me another interview?"

"Because" and now Letty tried to speak with her old playfulness—"it is wasted time, Mr. Haveryng. As long as you were ill, and appeared to have no friends near you, my good nature prompted me to pay you a few civilities. But now Uncle Dan's patient has dismissed both doctor and nurse, I have lost my vocation."

"It was not for that reason you left me so abruptly," he reminded her. "Nor have you given me an opportunity—frequently as I have entreated it—to convince you that I had no sinister motive in concealing—nay, that is not the proper word, for I had no thought of concealment—for not mentioning that I am distantly connected with the head of the Penruan family!"

Letty shuddered.

"Do not speak of it. I was too hasty; I confess it. Pray forget anything I may have said in my ill-humor. I hope you are enjoying yourself at the Abbey?"

"They are very kind to me," said Max, promptly. "But I have not been able to appreciate their goodness always. While you were displeased with me how could I be at ease anywhere?"

Letty put up her hand with one of her imperious gestures.

"Hush, Mr. Haveryng; I will not listen if you say such things as these! You and I are, and always must be, strangers to each other. Fate threw us together, and now separates us; it is no use embittering parting moments, either by regrets or idle flatteries. Treat me as you would one of your own sex, with whom you have spent a few pleasant hours now and then: wish me a 'Good-by' and a 'God-speed,' as I shall you, and then let us do our best to forget that we have ever met!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the sore-hearted, deeply-mortified Max—"impossible!"

"But, sir, I tell you it must be so!" she answered, impetuously. "I forbid you to annoy me with attentions which I will not accept. You are ungenerous—as Esther has already told you—to dog the footsteps of my friends, and force yourself into my presence! When I withdrew myself from the cottage you were given to understand, plainly enough, that I neither could nor would renew the acquaintance. It is ungentlemanly to compel me to repeat this to you myself!"

"If you have arrived at this decision solely because your friends dictate it, I protest against their interference!" said Max, with dignity. "But if your own personal dislike to me is so strong that you really wish to see me no more—"

He paused, for the swift rush of color to her cheek was a delightful token that that was not the case: and once again he ventured to take her hand and plead his cause in low, tender words.

"Why should you be angry with me for longing to behold you, or for being ready to avail myself of any pretext to be near you? How can I help wishing to see you, or craving to speak with you, even though you scorn and rail at me?"

"I must not listen to you any longer!" cried Letty, in distress. "Let me go, Mr. Haveryng. If we talked for another hour it would only be to repeat what we have already said. We cannot be friends; there are sad and sober reasons why we should never meet again. Neither must you detain me, for I ought not to have staid here so long."

"But you told me you were waiting to give a message to old Dan."

"True; but that was when I did not expect you to share my vigil," she honestly confessed. "If you will kindly leave me, I shall be glad to rest awhile; if you persist in remaining, I must depart!"

"Nay, I will not be the means of driving you hence again," said Max, with a vexed air. "But I shall remain on the beach till Dan comes home, lest you should be exposed to intrusion.

He had suddenly remembered the Squire when he said this, and the Lily grew pale as the flower from which he named her, and cast a startled glance toward the uncurtained window.

"What do you mean, Mr. Haveryng? Is there any one in St. Erne who would venture to come here without Uncle Dan's permission?"

"There certainly was a person in the porch when I arrived," he told her. "If I have alarmed you by mentioning it, I am sorry I did so; but I will not leave you while there is any danger of your being annoyed by his return."

"Then he went away," Letty commented. "I heard no one. Did he not speak to you?"

"No. I stumbled against him in the porch, and he quitted it without a word."

Her face resumed its placid expression.

"Ah! I dare say it was some poor fellow who seeks from Uncle Dan a cure for his rheumatism, or perhaps fancies himself ill-wished by a quarrelsome neighbor. But you look at me strangely!" she exclaimed, as their eyes met. "Was it not so? Did you know Uncle Dan's visitor?"

"Yes," Max answered, with some reluctance, for he comprehended intuitively that the Squire had wished to avoid recognition, and he scarcely considered himself justified in betraying him. Yet how could he prevaricate to Letty? When he asked, "Who was this man?" he felt compelled to reply, "It was Mr. Penruan!"

But he was not prepared for the burst of passionate reproach with which the tidings were received.

"And you brought him here! You have kept me in conversation, while he stood without and listened! Coward—traitor! Was it *you* who should have betrayed me? *You!* whom I persisted in thinking so honorable and good! Call in your kinsman, sir! I am at your mercy and his! I will no longer struggle with my destiny. He may do with me as he pleases! I cannot be more miserable than the knowledge of your treachery has made me!"

Thunderstruck by these accusations, Max made no attempt to interrupt her; but when she sunk on the nearest seat, and covered her face with her hands, he bent over her, and entreated her to look up and listen to him.

"As He who made us both hears and judges me, I swear to you that I am no traitor!—that I know no more of Mr. Penruan's actions and history than of your own."

"But he is here!" she gasped; "and I am lost!"

"He will not dare to injure or annoy you while I am by your side. Why do you fear him?"

"Ah! why, indeed?" she murmured. "Do not question me, for I dare not answer. Only tell me if he is still lurking near, and let me nerve myself, if I can, to meet him bravely."

Max went and opened the door of the cottage; the moon had now risen, and the porch was no longer in darkness.

"Mr. Penruan has gone," he assured the trembling girl. "There is not a creature visible."

"But he *was* there—you have yourself told me so—listening—watching! Oh, heaven! and I so defenseless! Esther away, and Dan, too! No one at hand to protect me from him!"

Carried beyond himself by the agony of terror in her sobbing tones, Max flung his strong arm about her, and drew her tenderly toward him.

"Nay; you are not without a defender, Letty, while I am near you. He must be a bold man who shall dare say a rude word to you while I am within hearing!"

But she abruptly withdrew herself from his embrace, and waved him from her. She was almost beside herself with fright, and broke into passionate reproaches.

"*You* protect—*you* defend me! No, no, I should loathe myself if I accepted aught from one in whose veins runs the blood of the Penruans. You are of the same heartless, avaricious, unscrupulous race; one of those who, Judas-like, smile upon and caress whoever they are plotting to destroy. I should be mad, indeed, to trust myself to a Penruan! Silence, sir! It is useless attempting to exonerate yourself. I will no longer be deceived by your false and deceitful protestations. Leave me, sir! Leave me, I say!"

His pulses tingling with her taunts—hot, angry as herself, Max needed no second bidding, but strode toward the door. There, however, with his hand on the latch, he paused to address her for the last time.

"You see I am about to obey you, and I shall do so to the letter. Never from this hour shall your name cross my lips, nor will I try directly or indirectly to have further communication with the woman who holds me unworthy her trust."

A low sob broke from Letty; but she did not speak, and he went on:

"A traitor, am I? Then it is to my own self-respect! Where was that when I stooped to plead for the love of one who refuses to do me justice—who loads me with accusations I never merited? A coward, too, you called me! Ay, and I am one; and it is you who have made me so; but it is not what man can do to me that I have dreaded. It is for you I have been anxious and fearful; for your sake that I have grieved over my want of wealth and power, and felt no longer light-hearted and careless of what might be in store for me. Yes, for *you*, who have goaded and stung me till I hate myself for having borne it so long! Why did you save me from death, if it were but to make me a miserable, hopeless man?"

Choking with emotion, he left her. It was the bitterest moment Max Haveryng had ever known, and he felt as if death would have been preferable to the anguish of such a parting. It was not only her positive refusal to confide in him that maddened him; this he could have borne with till he had proved himself worthy of her confidence; but also the galling knowledge that it was to some tyrannous or unjust act of his kinsman's he owed the treatment he had just received; and, for the nonce, he was at war with the whole world, and ready to think that there was no truth or goodness left in it.

He put out his hand to guide himself by the woodwork of the porch, for so violent was his emotion that he seemed to have suddenly lost the power of controlling his limbs. One step forward, and then, blind and dizzy, he dropped on the rude seat that Lily had sometimes shared with him on happier evenings.

But he was not alone with his grief and resentment, as he had supposed. Letty, shame-stricken and penitent already, had swiftly followed him, and, sinking on her knees, she laid her little hands on his arm.

He shivered beneath the touch, light though it was, and averted his face; he could not bear that any one should see how ghastly it had become; but he could not close his ears to the plaintive murmurs of her voice.

"Forgive me, Mr. Haveryng; sorrow and trouble have made me as unfeeling and unjust as those I blame. I was mad to doubt you! I did not in my heart—how could I? If you are not good and true, who is?"

He made no reply. Perhaps he was still struggling with an angry sense of the injustice dealt to him, or it may have been that her words were now so sweet that he hungered for more.

"Will you not pardon me?" she softly pleaded. "I know that I can never—never forgive myself; that the memory of the bitter, cruel things I have been saying will always haunt me; but I should not be quite so unhappy if I could hear you promise to try and forget them. Will you, Mr. Haveryng? If I could—if I did but know how, I would atone for all my unkindness! Ah, speak to me! Say that you do not hate me for it!"

"I could not hate you if I tried!" he answered, hoarsely.

"And you will endeavor to forgive me?" she pleaded.

"Nay, Letty; if these thoughts of me were on your mind, why should I blame you for avowing them?"

"But they were not!—they were not!" she cried, vehemently. "I have been taught by sad experience to be distrustful, and in my haste I said what I shall always regret—always! Will you not believe this?"

"I believe that you are too gentle and womanly by nature not to feel sorry when you have wounded the feelings even of a Penruan; but, when you have left me, will you not think me again what you called me just now?"

"I never think any but kind thoughts of you when I am away," she confessed, in tones that would have been inaudible to any one else.

"Then you contrive sometimes to ignore the fact that I am of a race so vile, that the mere misfortune of my birth makes you shrink from me as soon as we meet?"

The clasp of Letty's hands on his arm tightened a little.

"I do not shrink from you. If at one moment I have doubted you, the next has found me remorseful for my injustice. Ah! why cannot I recall my cruel speeches? Cannot you bring yourself to grant the pardon I am entreating? What shall I do—what shall I say to win it?"

Max looked at her now, as she knelt in the moonlight. The widow's cap, that he so detested, had slipped off, and masses of golden hair fell about her pure, sweet face, and lay loosely on her shoulders.

"Letty," he said, as he looked down into her beseeching eyes, "I have been a stranger to my own kin till within these last few weeks; and though I am one of the Judas family, whom you think it a virtue to detest—nay, hear me out—it is very hard that their sins should be visited on my head, and by you."

"Oh, do not upbraid me any more!" she said, bursting into tears. "My heart is heavy enough already! Only tell me how I shall atone!"

"By loving me!" he whispered, as his arms stole round her slight form; "even as I love you!"

"Ah! no, no! I must not—I dare not!" Letty began to remonstrate.

But her head rested on the breast of Max, and his

lips were kissing away the tears upon her flushed cheek. What wonder, then, that, for some few blissful moments, they both forgot everything but their own happiness?

A cheery whistle was heard, and Letty, in great confusion, would have struggled out of her lover's embrace.

"It is Uncle Dan. What will he say if he finds me here with you?"

"Nothing but what I can answer in half a dozen words," was the manly reply.

"And he will declare that this is what he has feared all along, and that we must never meet again."

"Has he any right to lay such an embargo on you?" Max asked, with a resentful air.

"Yes; the right that being almost my only friend for years has given him. Let me go; I cannot encounter his chidings to-night."

"Why should he chide you for loving me? Because of this unfortunate relationship? Yes; I see it is! But you, Letty—you will rise superior to such prejudices?—you will not be taught to doubt me again?"

"Never!" she answered, emphatically; and he was better satisfied. But she repeated her "Let me go!" with more urgency than before; for Dan, with his fishing-tackle on his shoulder, was drawing near the cottage.

"How can I consent to part with you till I know when I am to see you again?" he asked, as, with reluctance, he permitted her to disengage herself from his embrace.

"It shall be soon—very soon. I cannot promise more," she said, retreating into the cottage, and snatching up the shawl in which she had been muffled.

It was aggravating to be obliged to know that even now she was leaving him in utter ignorance of her real name, and whither she was going; but Max saw that she was greatly agitated, and forbore to question her on these points. Still he could not help murmuring a little.

"It is hard to let you leave me thus. How do I know but what all the old suspicions will be reawakened by those about you, and our next meeting indefinitely postponed?"

"No one shall prevent my seeing you once more, although I warn you that it may only be to say adieu!"

But Max was not to be discouraged now by such a warning, and he said so.

"While you have faith in me, Letty, I will not fear any such separation."

But she sighed, and, hurriedly bidding him adieu, would have flitted away if he had not held her.

"Is that all you say to me? Will you not give me some kind words to dream upon?"

She hesitated; but Dan's foot was already at the gate of the little garden. There was no time to lose, and she let her head fall once more on her lover's shoulder.

"Promise, then, not to think lightly of me if I tell you something. You are quite sure you will not? Then bend down that tall head that I may whisper it. Dear, kind Max, let what may come to pass, you will always be dearer to me than life itself!"

Ere he could thank her for the confession—ere he could press the lips that uttered it—she was gone, and old Dan was at the door, disincumbering himself of his burden.

"What, 's that thee, now, Master Haveryng, all alone, and a'most in the dark? Ha' ye been waiting long?"

"The letter! Give me my letter, Dan, there's a good fellow; and let me go!" urged Max, who would not stoop to falsehoods, and was, therefore, anxious to avoid any questioning.

The old man fetched Letty's note, dusting it with the cuff of his Jersey, and gazing at it admiringly, as if his love for the writer embraced everything her fingers had touched.

"There 'tis, my soa! Will ye have a scrap o' paper to wrap 'ee in? Take care on 'ee, Master Haveryng; for I'm bound to tell 'ee 'tis first and last—first and last!"

"Why should you try to lay an embargo on Letty's corresponding with me?" the young man angrily demanded.

"'Bargo here or 'bargo there, my lad, 'tis no use your running foul o' me," said the old fisherman, sturdily. "I ha' said my say, and done my dooty. I never did see the sense o' writin' letters. It's only puttin' on paper what's safest said in words, and carried no further; and so I'll ha' no hand in it after this."

"But you will not let me see Letty," Max remonstrated; "so what can I do but write to her?"

"I'll tell 'ee, lad. You can go away, and let her alone. 'Tis about the best thing you can do for all of us."

"Thanks for the advice! When I'm content to be treated as a child, I'll follow it! And the affronted Max stalked away, without further adieu, leaving the old fisherman in the porch, watching his receding figure, with many grave sighs, and much shaking of his hoary head.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCERNING A FAIR PLEADER, AND WHAT SHE URGED.

As soon as Max was descried crossing the grounds, Eleanor, who must have been watching for him on the terrace, threw her shawl over her head, gipsy fashion, and glided forward to meet him.

"How long you have been!" she exclaimed reproachfully; "and I am dying for some music. I have found the duets we agreed to practice, and was getting quite out of patience at your delay."

"Could you not find a substitute for me?" asked Max, good-humoredly. "Where is Captain Renton?"

"I am here!" said that gentleman, rising from a rustic seat half hidden by some shrubs; "and at Miss Haydon's service. But I decidedly object to be recognized as Mr. Haveryng's deputy, either for a song or a flirtation."

"We will have some glees!" cried Eleanor, hurriedly. "It will be quite a treat to try over some of the old favorites. Have you forgotten Bishop's 'Stay, prithee, stay,' Captain Renton?"

"Why not parody it, and say, "Go, prithee, go?'" he retorted. "It would be more appropriate. Don't you think so?"

"Certainly it would!" she made answer. "So, gentlemen, I invite both of you to 'go, prithee, go,' to the piano, and not keep me waiting any longer."

Although Max would have preferred a quiet perusal of his letter in his own chamber, and Captain Renton was evidently in no mood for singing, it was impossible to avoid compliance; and Eleanor kept them both at the instrument till she herself became so hoarse that Mrs. Penruan's maternal anxiety was aroused.

"My dear child, I forbid you to sing another note! Charlie, do take her music away. She will have an affection of the chest, or bronchitis, or something else horrible, and my poor, weak constitution would quite sink under such a shock as her death would be. I'm sure I could not survive it."

Mr. Penruan looked round anxiously; but Eleanor answered with a smile: "Don't jump at such a terrible climax in so few words, please, mamma. I don't think I am in imminent danger at present. However, for your peace sake, I'll be mute for the rest of the evening, and play the looker-on, while Captain Renton initiates Mr. Haveryng into the mysteries of zetema."

She brought forward the cards and markers; but Charlie Renton, with cold politeness, begged to be excused. He could not boast of any skill at cards, and, doubtless, Mr. Haveryng was more than a match for him.

"Then, my cousin, you must be content with me as an adversary," said Eleanor, gayly.

"More than content," replied Max, who was stung by the contempt of the young officer's voice and manner. "I shall be decidedly the gainer by the exchange."

So Captain Renton lounged on a sofa, apparently dividing his interest between a periodical and the game at backgammon Mrs. Penruan was languidly playing with her husband; but really within earshot of the couple at the card-table, and listening sharply to every word they exchanged.

They were, however, silent and abstracted, Max lending but little attention to Eleanor's explanations, and she confusing herself and falling into reveries so often, that at last, with a laugh at each other's blunders, they threw down their remaining cards, and rose.

"I worked too long in my garden this morning," the young lady observed, "and gave myself a headache; so, with your permission, mamma, I'll say good-night, and try what sleep will do toward removing it."

But, ere she left the room, Eleanor contrived to draw near to Max on pretense of restoring some books to their place; and whispered rapidly: "I must speak to you alone. I shall be in the library in five minutes."

This was a room that every one but Mr. Penruan appeared to avoid, and it may have been for this reason that Miss Haydon had chosen it for the interview. Perhaps Captain Renton heard her whispered speech, for, as she moved away, his eyes followed her reproachfully; and when she had quitted the room, he started up as if overcome with emotion or annoyance, and disappeared, bareheaded, through a casement that led to the garden.

Disturbed by the little bustle attending his rapid movements, Mrs. Penruan was seized with a fear that the rush of cold air into the room might lower the temperature too much for her delicate frame. So her maid was summoned, and leaning on her arm, she, too, said her "good-nights," and vanished.

Ere the Squire followed her example, he laid his hand on the shoulder of Max.

"I hope, my dear boy, that this naughty spoiled girl of ours is not trifling with either you or poor Renton. I can see that there is something amiss; but I won't ask what it is: I don't like meddling with young people. You know my thoughts already. Were I in your place I would not lose such a prize."

"Miss Haydon has only a sisterly liking for me, Mr. Penruan," Max interposed, but he was heard with smiling incredulity.

"You are very humble, my dear boy; too much so. I think you might reasonably have more confidence in your ability to command something more than a mere sisterly liking. When I think what a wife Eleanor would be for you—what a bright ornament to your distant home—how thoroughly she would enter into all your pursuits—how delighted she would be to share them, I cannot help wondering to see you so calmly dallying with your opportunities!"

"And would you be willing to give Eleanor Haydon to a man who has so little to recommend him as I?" exclaimed Max, dubiously.

Mr. Penruan smiled again.

"You are unusually scrupulous for a young lover. If you contrive to win my step-daughter's heart, do you think she will care whether I am or am not willing to sanction her bestowing her hand with it?"

Max did not answer directly. He did not choose to tell the Squire that he never intended to rank himself among the beautiful Eleanor's suitors, until he could comprehend why that gentleman so insidiously tempted him to do so.

"I have not thought much of marrying at present," he said at last. "And I have no notion of subjecting myself to a refusal. Will you excuse me? I have a letter to answer before I go to bed."

As soon as he had thus released himself from his crafty kinsman, Max went to the library. As he had anticipated, Eleanor was there before him, impatiently awaiting his coming.

"How long you have been!" she exclaimed. "Why have you loitered, when you might have known that I should be torturing myself with all sorts of doubts and fears? Where is Charlie Renton?"

"Thank you for giving me the key to the first part of your speech, which certainly puzzled me," Max retorted. "Your doubts and fears are not on my account, Miss Haydon. How grateful I ought to feel for such an avowal!"

"Don't taunt me," she said, coming nearer, and laying her hand on his arm. "I am unhappy enough, without your turning upon me too."

"My dear Eleanor, pray don't speak in that strain!" he answered, sympathetically. "I would not vex you for the world! What's amiss? How can I serve you?"

Some one opened the door as he spoke, and they started asunder; but not quickly enough to prevent the intruder seeing the affectionate attitude they had assumed. It was Captain Renton, and for a moment he gnawed his lip savagely; then, with a studiously polite, "Pray don't let me disturb you—I merely came in search of a book," he took one off the nearest table, and withdrew.

Eleanor waited a few seconds, and then returned to her young companion, with troubled looks.

"You have been quarreling with him—with Charlie Renton. Don't put me off with a denial, for I am certain of it."

"Very well," said Max; "then I'll merely say, in my own defense, that the dispute was forced upon me."

"What was it about?" she queried, in her most vehement manner. "Tell me; I insist on knowing."

"Then you must question Captain Renton. He can best tell you why he attacked me."

"I cannot do that; you know I cannot. He would think—ah!"—and she concealed her burning face—"I am afraid to surmise what he would think. It is you who must answer me."

"Impossible!" said Max, his anger rising, as he remembered all the injurious speeches Captain Renton had hurled at him. "I may guess why he flew at me like a wounded tiger; but I know that I did not deserve the reproaches he leveled at me."

"He was hurt—mortified. Forgive him—promise me that you will forgive him."

"And permit him to give me the thrashing, of which he talked so largely, without venturing a word or look in return? If Captain Renton leaves me alone, I promise to be equally forbearing; but how long I shall be able to submit to such covert insolence as his manner betrayed to-night, I can't say. There must be a spell upon this place, for I have been provoked and misrepresented ever since I set foot in it."

Again Eleanor put her hand on the arm of the incensed Californian.

"You have been very good—you have behaved admirably. Cannot you exercise the same discretion for another day or two? He will not stay longer."

Max gazed steadily at Eleanor until her countenance betrayed that the cause of her anxiety was no longer her own secret.

"Dear little cousin, I'd do as much and more for your sake, for you have been very kind to me. But don't you see that you are not acting generously by either Captain Renton or myself? In fact, you are placing us in a false position, and making us enemies, by your own injudicious proceedings."

"But I wish you to be at peace with each other," she answered, earnestly. "I want you to be Charlie Renton's friend. Poor fellow, he needs one more than he imagines! And you might have so much influence over him if you would but exert it!"

"You wish us to be friends, and you began by making Captain Renton horribly jealous of me!"

At the recollection, Eleanor burst into a fit of laughter, "How could I know that he would arrive at an awkward moment? It was such a situation, such a picture—you at my feet, with me in a theatrical *pose*, all unconscious of such a critical spectator; poor Charlie horror-stricken; and my step-father, in the character of Mephistopheles, grinning over his shoulder! But what did it signify?"—and checking her mirth she drew herself up haughtily—"Captain Renton has no right to evince any displeasure at what I do!"

"Tush, Eleanor! don't take refuge in your rights," said Max, boldly. "He loves you, and you know it—you have long known it—and you are not using him well. Nay; don't be offended at my plain speaking. You gave me leave to be frank with you, and at the risk of vexing you still more, I must add that I cannot play the part you assign to me."

"What part? What do you mean?" she demanded excitedly, struggling with her annoyance.

"I mean that Captain Renton mistakenly looks upon me as your favored lover, and that I cannot consent for him to be kept in this error."

"Undeceive him, then," said Eleanor, eagerly. "Do anything—say anything—only spare me the misery of knowing that I have contrived to set you at variance. All this long, wretched day have I been wandering to and fro, terrifying myself with the thought that you would meet somewhere and renew the dispute."

"And this was why you met me on the terrace. But were these fears for me, pretty coz? Not a bit of it. What a self-denying, good-natured fellow I must be to know this, and endure the mortification patiently."

"Indeed, I like you very much, Max. I would be extremely sorry if anything befell you."

"Thanks for that much consolation. You like me very well, but you like some one else much better."

"I have not given you leave to make such free and easy comments on what I say," Eleanor responded, with a frown. Then her mood changing, she extended her clasped hands. "But I do throw myself on your mercy, cousin Max. Act for me as you would if you were my brother. Endure with poor Charlie's irritability, and try to win him into a better mood. Make him understand that he has not been as hardly dealt with as he imagines; and—and—"

"Whisper to him that the lady of his love is still fond and faithful—eh?"

"No, no," she replied with a sob. "Tell him nothing of this, for I can never—never be his wife. Persuade him to relinquish a vain pursuit—to go abroad—to marry another; to do anything but hope to win me!"

"Eleanor! has he offended you past all forgiveness?"

"He!" and a sob choked her utterance. "Poor Charlie! No, no! I had rather not tell you why I say this, but it is not connected with him. Captain Renton is a good honorable young fellow, and I shall never cease to pray for his happiness."

But Max scarcely heard her last words. His eyes had accidentally fallen on that same small side door, which had once before attracted his attention—the door that, if Eleanor spoke truly, led to the most ruinous part of the Abbey. As he gazad, he heard the key gently turned, and the door was cautiously opened a couple of inches or so. Some one was eavesdropping; and, provoked at the impertinence of the act, he suddenly sprung across the room to drag forth the spy, and denounce such conduct.

But quickly as he moved, Eleanor was beside him ere he reached the door, and she seized the arm ex-

tended to push it open, thus giving the person on the other side time to close and secure it.

"What were you about to do?" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

"Need you ask? Did you not see that some one was watching us? Must we submit to this sort of espionage?"

"Yes," she answered, significantly. "In Penruan Abbey, we learn to close our eyes, and hold our tongues. You are not very shrewd, Monsieur Max, or you would have discovered this already."

But Max was too angry to be appeased by the hint.

"I know that I am not going to have my actions pried into either by Captain Renton or Mr. Penruan himself; and I wish you had not interfered to prevent my saying so to whoever the person was that has been attempting it. How dare they act so dishonorably?"

"Hush, you impetuous boy!" cried Eleanor. "You are laboring under a grave mistake. It could be no one but our old servant, who, hearing voices here at this unusual hour, came to learn for herself who it could be disturbing her."

"Call the woman out, and let me satisfy myself that you are right," said Max, who had reasons of his own for doubting the correctness of this assertion. He could not forget what he had been told on a former occasion.

"Is not my word sufficient?" asked Eleanor, proudly.

"Not quite," was the reply. "You think this avowal rude; but you must bear in mind that you told me once that this door led to the uninhabited part of the Abbey. How, then, comes this woman to be so close to it, while we are engaged in conversation? Why does she hide in the ruins?"

The young lady hesitated a moment; then, in a low, thrilling whisper, made answer:

"If I did not tell you precisely the truth, blame me not. That door must never be passed by you. Beyond it lies a terrible secret—the crowning shame of Mr. Penruan's evil life—the curse that clings to him, and makes even the gold for which he sinned a burden to him!"

Max recoiled a step, doubting his own hearing, and mechanically echoing those strange words: "*A terrible secret! The crowning shame of Penruan's evil life!*" But when he looked to Eleanor for some explanations, she shook her head mournfully, and glided away.

At the same minute, the lamp that stood on the table flickered and went out, and the young man hastily groped his way from the ill-omened door, which he had been so impressively told that he must never pass.

The mysteries were deepening, and Max went to his chamber thoughtful and perplexed.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW MAX PROPITIATED THE CAPTAIN.

STROLLING into the stables on the following morning, Max Haveryng heard what might account for Squire Penruan's secret visit to the cottage of old Dan Calynack. One of the grooms had been suspected of stealing some old harness; and though really innocent, the lad had been so frightened by his master's threats of imprisonment, that he had fled, and persuaded his friends to conceal him till the missing articles were found, or the relentless squire's fury somewhat appeased.

There had been a rumor that the poor groom—a native of St. Erne—had gone to old Dan for counsel, and was in hiding at his cottage; and hearing this from one of the lad's fellow-servants, Max resolved to write to Letty, in spite of the restrictions laid upon such attempts to draw her into a correspondence. He argued to himself that such a communication was not only excusable but necessary, and it would answer a twofold purpose—relieve her of the fears she had been entertaining, and enable Dan to warn the concealed and suspected youth that the Squire was searching for him.

Accordingly, he wrote a long, ardent epistle—hot, impetuous, like himself—yet so honest, so chivalrous in its devotion, that no woman could have perused it unmoved; and, as soon as breakfast was over, he descended the cliffs, and sought old Dan, to whom, if he would have it delivered, it must be intrusted.

But the white sails of the fisherman's lugger were just visible in the distance, and the door—a most uncommon occurrence—was locked. The little window, however, was easily unhasped, and Max dexterously tossed his letter on a table, where it was sure to be seen by Dan on his return.

"He may grumble and mutter, but he will scarcely venture to withhold it from my Letty," the young man concluded. "Perhaps before the day is over it will be in those dear little hands of hers; and it may incline her to hasten the moment for that interview she has promised me. I wish she would consent to be mine at once, and let me bear her to Aquas Dolces—away from these masqueradings and mysterious proceedings, which are becoming more and more intolerable to me."

The note—the first and last he was ever to receive, according to old Dan—had been couched in terms that positively forbade any such hopes as Max was now cherishing. But he comforted himself with the recollection that it was penned before he and Letty came to an understanding—before she had confessed that he would always be dear to her, and vowed never more to doubt him.

Dwelling on these thoughts, he had re-ascended the cliffs, and was strolling along the top on his way to the Abbey, when he came upon Captain Renton, seated moodily on a jetting crag. The young officer's brows lowered till he looked black as a thunder-cloud when Max appeared in sight; but unheeding this ill-humor his quondam friend took no pains to conceal, the young Californian quietly seated himself at no great distance.

"Will you give me a light?" he asked, taking out his pipe. "I think I can enjoy a whiff after my climb up those rocks. It is a fine coast!"

Captain Renton gave him some vesuvians, and coldly assented to the remark; then rose, shook himself, and began moving away, as if he was inwardly determined not to accept such companionship.

"Don't go yet, Renton; you owe me an apology—"

"A what?" and the captain came back with clenched fists.

But Max went on coolly enough, "An apology, and I owe you in return an explanation."

"The one you will never have!" he was angrily told; "and the other comes too late."

"Nonsense!" cried sturdy Max. "You are no Englishman if you refuse to listen to the truth; and you are no gentleman, Captain Renton, if you deny me an opportunity for exonerating myself from the charges you made against me the other night."

"Was this speech conned in the library last evening?" he was sarcastically asked. "Has your exculpation been arranged for you?"

Max smiled.

"On the contrary, if I had been troubled with an excess of vanity, the interview of which you were a witness would have terribly mortified me, for I learned before it was half over, what, by-the-by, I have long suspected, that you are a luckier fellow than you deserve to be."

"Explain yourself, Mr. Haveryng; or is this intended as a fresh insult?" demanded the indignant Renton.

"I mean that if you had not permitted yourself to be easily deceived by appearances, you would have comprehended all along that Miss Haydon and I are merely friends—cousins—nothing more."

Captain Renton dashed his cigar over the cliffs, and laughed bitterly.

"*Friends*, who whisper together, who hold secret meetings, who have no eyes, no ears, no thoughts for any one but each other? Thanks for the information. Did Miss Haydon bid you bring it to me? Am I to congratulate her on the friendship of such an *honorable* man as yourself?"

"I hope that you will do so when you know me better," said Max, composedly. "Until I am conscious of having degraded myself by some mean or base act, I do not think that Eleanor will withdraw her kindly regard for me."

"If you do not wish me to strike you to the earth," exclaimed his exasperated auditor, "do not breathe that name again in my hearing!"

"Pshaw!" retorted Max, good-humoredly; "what is the use of all this tall talk? I neither intend to quarrel with nor to fight you. In fact, after this morning, I am quite ready to promise that I will not intrude myself upon you, but go to St. Erne, and remain there as long as you choose to stay at the Abbey."

"Was this arrangement planned also?" he was asked, with a distrustful glance.

"No; it is my own idea entirely. Only sit down, and let me tell my story in my own way, and then, if you still choose to find fault with me, why, so be it. I shall have done my best to undeceive you; and if you persist in being obstinate and wrong-headed, I cannot help it!"

Ashamed of the violence that had so little effect on the imperturbable Californian, Captain Renton resumed his seat, and lit another cigar. If he must hear what his successful rival had to say, why, better to get it over and have done with it.

Much to his surprise, Max took up his narrative from the moment in which they parted at the West End hotel. He told how the name of Penruan Abbey, when mentioned by Renton himself, had awakened some vague reminiscences, and he produced the old pocket-book of his father, which he had searched till he found the entries in which John Penruan was mentioned.

Passing rapidly over his early rambles in Cornwall, and endeavors to find the friends of his father's boyhood, he proceeded to relate his first visit to the Abbey, his fall from the cliffs, and discovery, as he lay at the foot insensible, by Letty and Dan Calynack.

Then his tale was no longer hurried over. With all a lover's tenderness he dwelt upon the beauty and goodness of the Lily of St. Erne; and though he said nothing of the mystery surrounding her, but left his hearer to infer that she was actually the young widow she represented herself, he did not hesitate to avow that he had given his heart away to this fair flower, before he beheld Eleanor of Penruan.

"But such a match would be beneath you!" exclaimed Charlie Renton, who had become intensely interested.

"Why?—because she calls herself a fisherman's niece? Let me tell you that there is a rugged honesty and nobility about Dan Calynack that makes one proud to take him by the hand. Letty is a lady by nature; what care I if she cannot boast of a long pedigree? And once back at Aquas Dolces, who would know whether my pretty English bride were peeress or peasant?"

"It seems, however, that since you transferred yourself from the cottage to Penruan Abbey, you have wavered in your allegiance," said Renton, remembering his jealous suspicions.

"On my soul, I have not; nor would Miss Haydon have accepted my suit if I had been so hypocritical as to proffer it. Bah, man! where are your eyes? Does a woman who loves admit a man into such familiar intimacy as she permits to me? never blushing when he touches her hand, nor hesitating to talk to him precisely as she would to her father or her brother? When she confessed to me last evening that she had been in agonies all day lest we were disputing, were her fears for me? No, no! If you had knocked all the breath out of my body, as you threatened to do, she would have been too thankful for your escape, and too proud of your prowess, to have much pity to spare for my bruises."

"But she met you in the library. I heard the whisper that carried you there," retorted Charlie, but half convinced.

"Yes; that she might lay her royal commands on me not to offend her hero. What is there amiss betwixt you and Eleanor? Don't take offense at the question, there's a good fellow, nor fancy that I wish to interfere with what does not concern me; but, if you love each other as I believe you do, what keeps you apart?"

"What, indeed?" sighed the captain, now wholly unbending. "I cannot tell. In my boyhood, her father encouraged us to like each other; and, though I lost sight of the family for some years after they left India, and Mr. Haydon died, yet, when I returned to England with my regiment, Eleanor gave me the warmest of welcomes. Neither does Mr. Penruan look coldly on me, though I am free to confess that I have nothing to live on but my pay, and, therefore, am no match for an heiress."

"Mr. Penruan does not seem to care who takes his step-daughter off his hands," muttered Max. "He is a most incomprehensible sort of an old gentleman."

"You are not doing him justice," he was vehemently assured. "Mr. Penruan may love money; I do not deny that; but under his harsh exterior he hides kind and generous emotions."

"Very glad to hear you say so," Max commented. "I began to have some doubts about it myself."

"Then let me give you an instance of his good feeling," cried Renton, eagerly. "When I first came down to the Abbey, I did not consider myself justified in acknowledging my affection for Eleanor until I had frankly acquainted her step-father with the state of my heart. Instead of sneering at my presumption and forbidding me to see her again, he not only heard me with patience, but confessed that if he were in my place, he should not let her fortune frighten me away. He said that in my wandering life, it would of course be quite a blessing to have such a creature as Eleanor beside me, and plainly intimated that if she chose to become my wife, I need not fear any opposition from him."

"Very good of my excellent kinsman, really!" said Max, sarcastically. "The only thing that detracts from my admiration of his generosity is the fact that he has said much the same to me!"

"Then it must be as I suspected," the captain moodily replied. "She has transferred her affections to you, and has won him over to her way of thinking."

"I do not believe it. Nay, I am positive that you are wrong. Eleanor Haydon warned me in the frankest manner that I must not be persuaded into making love to her, and I never have. Mr. Penruan's motives for what he does and says are mysteries to me; but I'm ready to stake my life on the good faith and honest dealing of the young lady."

"But you saw how she received me. Can you assure me that her manner was only assumed to conceal some pique, and that she may be persuaded to become mine?"

The eager face of Max began to cloud. No; he could not give the required assurance, for had not Eleanor herself tearfully declared that she could never, never give her hand to Charlie Renton?

"By San Jago!" he exclaimed, vexedly; "it is ill meddling with what does not concern one in this country, for every affair that I have been mixed up with has proved a tangled coil that defied me to unravel. When I have said that I am certain Eleanor loves you I must pause, for I am as much in the dark as to the cause of her coldness as you can be. Go to her boldly, man, and learn it from her own lips."

But Renton did not rise from his desponding attitude.

"It is useless. I have done so more than once, but to no purpose. I came here to seek to win the old kind looks from her eyes—to hear her speak my name as she used to do, but in vain. Always the same chilling reception, always the same regrets that I persist in wasting my time in these visits; till at last, maddened and despairing, I resolve to depart, and vow that I will do my best to forget her. But some relenting whisper when we are parting, some mournful yet tender glance, always revives the belief that she still loves me, and this belief strengthens instead of fading with absence. And so I come here again, and yet again, to endure the same alternation of hopes and fears; to think her at one moment the most heartless of coquettes, yet at the next to ask myself if there is not some reason for her conduct, which I ought to learn before I condemn her."

"It must be a very miserable way of going on," said Max, sympathetically; "and were I in your place, I should not rest till I had searched to the bottom of the matter."

"You speak as if that were easy to do; as if I had but to remonstrate with a capricious girl, and prevail upon her to tell me her secret thoughts. But it is not so. When I press Eleanor on the subject, she either bursts into tears, and flies my presence, or else haughtily reminds me that she has already declared we can never be united, and insists that I shall cease to persecute her."

"And you throw yourself into a jealous rage, there is a tableau, and the curtain falls! *Ay, de mi*, and I know not how to advise you, except that, were I in your place, I would persevere."

"Have you any reason for saying this?" asked Charlie, catching like a drowning man at a straw. "Has Eleanor said anything that induces you to give me this encouragement?"

Max shook his head.

"This is a house of secrets, and I am in no one's; neither am I the wisest of counselors for a lover hot-headed enough already to run a tilt with every one who gets in his way."

Captain Renton held out his hand.

"I have not used you well by my suspicions, Mr. Haveryng, but you must forgive me; for such anxiety as I have been enduring during the last few months makes a fellow ill-natured and distrustful against his will."

Max took the hand extended to him, and griped it cordially.

"Eleanor bade me to persuade you to accompany me to California when I return. What say you to appearing as if you acquiesced in the plan? Perhaps the thought that you are leaving her forever may throw her off her guard, and give you the advantage you seek.

The advice was considered good. Captain Renton had suffered so much through Eleanor Haydon's inexplicable conduct, that he would not be sorry to turn the tables upon her, if it were possible.

"Nay," he exclaimed, firmly, "I will not only say that I intend leaving England, but I will positively be the companion of your voyage, if you will put up with me. It is degrading myself to come here, urging a suit to which I obtain naught but denials. Eleanor shall either consent to be mine, or I will try whether, in change of scene, I cannot forget her."

Max applauded the resolution; and Renton was striding away to carry it into effect, when the sound was heard of horse's hoofs, and Eleanor came cantering along the cliffs on the back of the restive brute she denominated Ursa Minor.

With much difficulty, she reined him in as she drew near the gentlemen; and Captain Renton, seeing how troublesome the horse appeared, would have gone to its head, but she sharply bade him keep back.

"Thanks for your good intentions, sir; but my

steed is like his mistress—he will not brook any interference," she cried, saucily.

"And his mistress must be mad to ride him along these dangerous hights!" retorted the blunt Max.

"*Merci, monsieur!*" was the gay reply. "That speech of yours implies a confession that I am not without brains, although they may not be as thoroughly under control as they ought. And now I'll tell you, in my own defense, that Ursa Minor is more afraid of falling over the cliffs than I am. You shall see how, when I urge him to the brink of them, he shudders and retreats."

"For goodness' sake, Eleanor!" ejaculated Captain Renton, growing white with dread as the darling girl rode to the very edge of the rocks.

"There is no danger," she said, smiling and bending toward him, as he sprung forward, and grasped her reins. "This ill-conditioned palfrey of mine will be manageable for an hour when I have thoroughly frightened him."

"And me! Have you no pity for the alarm you are inflicting on me?" asked Renton, so tenderly, that, with a blush, she raised herself to her former erect posture, and turned her head toward Max.

"Cousin mine, the first civility you paid me was searching for my whip. Will you repeat the kind act? I must have dropped it at no great distance."

Max went immediately to seek for it, and as he came back she rode to meet him, whispering, with suppressed eagerness, as soon as she was near enough. "Well, you are friends, ain't you? Oh, good Max, I cannot thank you sufficiently! And he—what did he say? You have quite disabused him of his foolish notions?"

"Certainly. I have hinted my conviction that Miss Haydon's heart was given away before she had the felicity of beholding me."

"How absurd—how wrong to tell him this!" cried the young lady, coloring and smiling. "Did you obey my injunctions? Did you invite him to go away with you?"

"I did; but were I in his place, I should not do so, until I knew why my affections were so wantonly played with by the lady of my love!"

"Played with—wantonly!" Eleanor repeated, her eyes flashing with resentment. But the next minute they were streaming with tears, and ere Max could apologize for the offense he had given, she had smartly whipped her horse, and was dashing along the road at a pace that left the young men in terror for her safety.

CHAPTER XVI.

DOWN THE CHIMNEY OR THROUGH THE KEYHOLE.

She met them at dinner, radiant with smiles, and looking so charming in her demi-toilet, that Max was not surprised at the infatuation Charlie Renton evinced for this lovely but inscrutable girl; a girl far more difficult to understand than even Letty, for, unlike the latter, she appeared to be endowed with all that should have made her life a happy one.

She had had a delightful ride, she told them, and brought Ursa Minor back to his stable so tired, and in consequence so tractable, that the grooms scarcely knew him.

"He will break your neck some day, and then there will be an end to your wild freaks!" the Squire observed, coarsely, as he helped his lady to some fish.

"I hope not, sir, for your sake!" Eleanor sarcastically replied. "I know how deeply *you* would mourn my loss, and what an expense it would be to you to put the servants in black!"

Mrs. Penruan dropped her fork, and evinced hysterical symptoms.

"If you two will persist in saying such horrid things to each other," she sobbed, "I know I shall be seized with spasms or convulsions! It's very cruel of you, Eleanor, when you know how fond I am of turbot, and that I shall not be able to touch a bit, and all through your dreadful speeches!"

"Pray go on with your dinner, mamma," said the young lady; "I would not spoil your enjoyment of the turbot on any account. I forgot that you were here when I spoke."

"You are very considerate all at once!" muttered Mr. Penruan, spitefully. "It isn't often that you profess to care who is annoyed by your ill-bred attempts to be witty at my expense!"

"Yes," was the reply; "I must admit that I am not an apt scholar, or you, sir, would have taught me long since not to say what I think so readily!"

After this little sparring match, there was an awkward silence, till a melon was placed on the table with the dessert, which drew from Max some remark relative to the fruits of his native soil.

"Splendid country, America!" said the Squire, sententiously. "Plenty of money to be made there! That's the place for young men of enterprise and energy!"

"I hope you are right, sir, though I have heard the remark contested," Charlie Renton exclaimed; "for I have serious thoughts of accepting a friend's invitation, and trying my own fortune there."

"Dear me, Charlie! do you mean this?" cried Mrs. Penruan, with dilated eyes. "Going to America. Do you hear what he says, Eleanor? Why, I always thought—"

"You are spilling your wine, mamma. Shall I peel an apricot for you?" her daughter hastily interposed, with a glance which, though the obtuse lady could not understand, told her that she had made a mistake, and must be silent. She, therefore, said no more, but relieved her mind by sighing and groaning every time there was a break in the conversation.

Mr. Penruan seemed greatly interested in the plans of his guest, questioning him upon them till the young man, who had not formed any, grew quite confused, in spite of the prompting of Max, who sat opposite.

At last the Squire turned suddenly to his step-daughter. "Eleanor, we have not heard your opinions on this new scheme! What do you say about it?"

For a moment her voice failed her, but she quickly regained composure. "What can I say, except that it is an excellent one? I have always thought that Captain Renton was capable of better things than sauntering about the streets of a garrison town, or drilling raw recruits, or playing at mimic war as I have seen our soldiers doing at Aldershott."

"Would you prefer to see me engaged in real warfare?—doing my best to get rid of an arm or a leg?" asked Charlie, with affected jocularity.

"No, indeed; but I always fancy that a soldier's life in times of peace must be monotonous and unsatisfactory. The new States of America will surely afford better opportunities for employing your abilities."

"Yes," said the young officer, stung into bitterness by the indifference with which she spoke, "I may renounce every hope I once cherished, and bid my native country an eternal farewell, to become in another land a soured, moody, discontented man. But what matters that if I amass money, keep out of the way of every one who considers me a bore, and don't trouble my acquaintances in England with too many letters?"

"Your friends at Penruan will always rejoice to hear of your welfare," Eleanor gently told him; and the young man bowed low.

"Thanks, Miss Haydon, for this unexpected token of interest in my future. I suppose you mean that if I neither get killed by an Indian on the way, nor leave my bones to bleach on the prairie, I may be permitted to drop you a line occasionally. Perhaps you think it will amuse us both to recall old times, when the Atlantic lies between us? Such reminiscences will not affect your spirits—will they?"

"I wish you would send me some nice ostrich feathers," Mrs. Penruan languidly interposed. "I should like pale blue best, if you could get hold of a bird of that color."

Max nearly exploded into a laugh at the notion of blue ostriches, but Eleanor and the captain were too much in earnest to heed the interruption.

"Yes," said the former, with a forced smile; "it will, as you say, be very amusing, when we have both grown older and wiser, to recall some of our youthful follies. Of course you will go to Aquas Dolces, and my cousin will introduce you to all the dark-eyed donnas of his acquaintance; and you will learn to dance boleros and fandangos, Captain Renton; and then you will remember, with no little amusement, how horror-stricken you were when you found me practicing those dances."

"I am afraid I shall remember too many events that it would be more prudent to forget," said Renton, with a sigh so profound that, in spite of herself, Eleanor Haydon changed color, and her voice began to falter.

"You think so just now," she told him; "but presently, when you have overcome feelings that, although they do you honor, must not be cherished—then—yes, then—you will be glad—you will agree with me that—that——"

She suddenly broke down, and, rising from the table, hurried from the room.

Captain Renton caught a glimpse of her troubled face; and sprung up to follow, but, with an imperious gesture, she forbade it; and when he would have persisted, Eleanor swiftly passed through the nearest door and turned the key, thus preventing any further pursuit.

"How thoughtless the child is!" complained Mrs. Penruan, whose grapes had been upset by her daughter's hasty movements; "and so strangely contrary! Only yesterday, when I was saying how like old times it seems to have Charlie here, she snapped me up so sharply that I had the headache for hours, and now she is in tears at the idea of his going away!"

The distress Eleanor had not been able to conceal, was balm to the wounded spirits of her lover, who, while he would fain have assuaged her grief, could not but rejoice that it was for him. But Max, who, as a looker-on, saw more of the game, was less struck by the young lady's emotion, than the effect it produced on Mr. Penruan.

The keen, deeply-set eyes of the silent Squire had watched both the young people during their conversation, and, finally, rested on Eleanor, as she sped away, with ill-concealed exultation. No pity for her tears moved his cold heart; on the contrary, it was as if he rejoiced to see her in such straits that she must either submit to see Captain Renton expatriate himself on her account, or consent to be his.

Could it be because he felt a real liking for the young officer? And, if so, why had he urged Max to endeavor to win his fair step-daughter? The question was a perplexing one.

Presently, Mrs. Penruan accepted Captain Renton's arm, and went back to her invalid couch in the drawing-room, leaving the Squire and his young kinsman together. It was a propitious moment for testing the true state of his host's feeling on the subject that engrossed him; and Max, therefore, made the following observation:

"Miss Haydon left us abruptly, and was evidently in distress. Can she be *fretting* over Renton's determination?"

"Are you jealous?" he was asked in return. "Pooh! Nell and the lad have known each other ever since they were babies; such intimacies rarely end in matrimony. At the same time if you are wise, you will look after your own interests. Charles Renton is a handsome young fellow, and an officer; and ladies think as much of the red coat as of the wearer!"

"True; and, therefore, I should have no chance against him."

"I don't know that," the Squire promptly replied; "girls are whimsical, and Eleanor has liked you from the first."

"But, seriously, my cousin, would you consent to give your beautiful step-daughter to either of us, seeing that we have our fortunes to make, and are in no way her equals in worldly advantages?"

"Psha! my dear boy, how you harp upon these scruples of yours! Do you really think that this spoiled child will permit any one to bias her choice, or prevent her marrying when and whom she pleases?"

"But she is not of age; she has guardians, has she not?"

"Yes," was the slow reply; "I am one of Eleanor Haydon's guardians, and her mother is the other."

"Am I, then, to understand that neither you nor Mrs. Penruan would oppose her union with Captain Renton or myself?" Max plainly asked.

The Squire laughed softly, and rubbed his hands together.

"Oppose Eleanor! Are you dreaming? Would she listen if we did? Ought we not to be very thankful if she sets her affections on some honorable, well-born young man, who will be a good husband to her? And, now I have answered all your questions, suppose you answer mine. What do you intend doing? Giving up the field to Renton! Your chances are equal—yes, your chances are equal."

"But which of us do you incline to favor, Mr. Penruan?" his companion demanded.

But the Squire only shook his head, laughed more odiously than before, and declaring that he never interfered in such delicate matters, went away to his study, leaving Max to cogitate over his queer sayings.

"I cannot understand him at all," the young man said, after long deliberation. "This much is evident—that he is eager to get Eleanor off his hands; but why? If he wishes her to marry, why does he not carry her to London, where she would have a fair chance of doing so? It is neither for my sake nor Renton's that he so insidiously urges us to woo her. And we are two simpletons, who are no match for this crafty gentleman: Charlie, because love blinds him; and I, because I never served an apprenticeship at trickery and deceit. If a man cheated or robbed me, I gave him a thrashing, kicked him out of my way, and thought no more about it; but one must deal differently with clever, evil-smiling John Penruan!"

As Max was sauntering from the drawing-room, another thought struck him.

Eleanor—what did she know respecting Mr. Penruan's maneuvers? Was she equally in ignorance of his motives in seeking a husband for her? Had not her contemptuous allusions to him, her openly expressed scorn of his flattering civilities to his young kinsman, often contained hints that he was a double-dealer? and, though these hints had been enigmatical at the time, Max felt that their explanation might be easy enough if he could induce the young lady to be frank with him.

He went in search of her as soon as this idea entered his head; but, with every trace of tears carefully effaced, she was at the piano, singing sprightly French chansons to her mother. Captain Renton, angry at her levity, had ensconced himself in a different corner, with some maps of the Southern States of North America, and chose to appear as indifferent as his capricious mistress.

As soon as Max appeared, she insisted that he should give her another lesson on the guitar, and laughed with forced gayety at her own mistakes, which were so many that at last her teacher laid his hand on the strings.

"You are not in the cue for music to-night," he told her. "Come out on the terrace for a stroll. I want half-an-hour's serious conversation with you."

"But I am not in a serious mood to-night," she replied, with a pout. "You must propose something more amusing than watching the moon, and pacing solemnly beneath it like two ghosts."

"But I *must* speak with you. I have something of consequence to say to you," he insisted, and she drew herself up haughtily.

"Mr. Haveryng, when I asked you to be the friend of Captain Renton, I did not think you would so far forget yourself as to abet him in this folly."

"I am not aware that I am doing so. If you think I wish to plead his cause, you are mistaken. What would be the use of it? If you will not listen to the man who loves you, I am sure you will not hear me."

"You are very cruel!" she exclaimed, with quivering lip.

"For what? For counseling Renton to take you at your word, and leave you?"

"No," said Eleanor, stifling a sob. "If you have done this, I thank you; only bid him be prompt in his departure. This miserable period of suspense combines with his reproaching looks to madden me!"

"Let us talk it over where we are not so likely to be observed," urged Max; but she drew away the hand he would have placed on his arm.

"No, no; it is, as you have just observed, useless—quite useless. You ought to know by this time that there are subjects on which I cannot listen to you. Unless you wish to offend me, you will never speak in this strain again."

"But you will grant me the half-hour's quiet conversation I ask? It is of myself I wish to speak, not of Renton."

"To-morrow, then," she said, turning from him.

"But why not to-night?" he pleaded. "I have questions to ask which you alone can answer, and I am impatient for explanations which only you can give."

She looked surprised, but shook her head dissentingly.

"I could not give you a patient hearing to-night. I am tired to death! Go and play chess with that forlorn friend of ours; you can have nothing to say but what may be postponed until I am in a brighter mood."

Murmuring a little at the caprices of woman, Max obeyed, and between the chess-board and confidential chat, he and Charlie Renton contrived to wile the evening away. Eleanor had disappeared as soon as she had laid aside the guitar, to return no more.

At the customary early hour, Mr. Penruan lighted his candle, and his guests retired to their chambers; Charlie Renton to pass the hours till daylight distracting himself with conjectures as to the cause of Eleanor's inexplicable behavior; and Max, equally sleepless but far happier, to lie thinking of Letty, and recall those sweet moments when she knelt beside him, looking up in his face, acknowledging that she had wronged him, and pleading with such tender, gracious words for his forgiveness.

A slight creaking noise became audible presently—a noise that made itself heard at no great distance from the head of the huge four-post bed in which the young man was lying. Accustomed to hear the rats scamper along behind the wainscot, Max took no account of the sound, although it continued to be heard at intervals until it was followed by a slight rustling, like that produced by the movements of a woman clad in silk.

Raising himself upon his elbow, he cautiously opened the curtains of his couch, but the night was so dark that he could discern nothing but the dim outlines of a table beneath the window, at which he was accustomed to write or read when in the humor for a little solitary amusement.

Suddenly he rubbed his eyes, and then looked again. Was it fancy that a shadow had fallen betwixt him and the table? and, if he were not mistaken, what could have occasioned it?

The shadow moved, and he held his breath as he watched it; and now it rose higher, and threw upon

the white blind the profile of a human face, ere it receded, and was seen no more.

It was no longer an illusion of his own brain. Some one was in the room with him; and Max loudly shouted the inquiry, "Who is there?"

Receiving no answer, he leaped from the bed, lighted his lamp, and searched the apartment carefully, but only to satisfy himself that he was its sole tenant.

The reflection might have been cast on the blind from without, he told himself; and, opening the casement, he peered down into the broad court-yard below. But all there was still as the grave; and, mystified by the occurrence—trivial though it was—he went back to bed.

But lying there, unable to obtain any repose, with his senses so morbidly alive to every sound that even the ticking of his own watch became painfully distinct, became so intolerable, that at last Max rose and dressed himself. He had been sketching his Californian home from memory for Eleanor, and it would amuse him to finish the drawing while waiting for daylight.

Accordingly, he seated himself at the table beneath the window, and opened the portfolio that lay upon it. The first thing that met his eye was a spray of the maiden's-hair fern, that had most certainly not been there the preceding evening. Beneath it lay a tiny note, directed to himself.

He tore it open. Yes; it was in Letty's graceful handwriting. A couple of lines—no more; but his eyes sparkled joyfully as he read them—

"The bearer of this only permits me to say that to-morrow evening, beside the spring in Trevor Wood, you may find L. R. awaiting you."

When the note had been kissed, read, and re-read, and finally put carefully away in the small pocket-book that Max always carried about him, other sensations began to awaken.

How came this note in his folio? It was not there when he went to bed; therefore it must have been Letty's messenger whose shadow he saw. But how came she there?

His door was locked, precisely as he had left it; and a wild fancy that she might have crept through the panel he had once seen opened, was dispelled directly by the impossibility of any full-grown person squeezing through so narrow an opening.

Still, the facts were incontrovertible. The letter had been intrusted to human hands. It must have found its way hither by human agency, and now he was resolved to discover the route by which its bearer penetrated to his chamber.

As soon as day had fully dawned, the young man commenced his researches, going round and round the wainscoted walls, rapping them, searching for secret springs, and always returning discomfited to the panel on which hung the miniature.

Here, at last, the mystery was solved. There was no hinged door, as he had imagined, but a chance touch disclosed that, from floor to ceiling, the square, of which it formed a part, slid aside sufficiently to enable him to pass through, and unhesitatingly Max sprung through the long-sought opening.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT MAX SAW IN THE RUINS.

As soon as the young Californian quitted his room, he found himself in darkness so profound that he was obliged to return for his lamp. With this in his hand, he was able to perceive that the opening admitted him into a long, narrow passage, extending on either hand, and that there were bolts to secure the wainscot in its place, which bolts Letty's messenger must have neglected to fasten when his loud call startled, and induced her to beat a hasty retreat.

But for this omission, her secret would have been safe; and Max debated within himself whether he was justified in taking advantage of it. But curiosity eventually predominated, and, turning to the right, he proceeded to explore the passage.

The end of it was soon reached, and he saw before him a sliding panel, similarly secured to his own. Whither would this lead him? Was he, a hospitably-treated guest at Penruan, justified in prowling about his kinsman's dwelling at daybreak, making explorations that had not received the sanction of its owner? Would it not be more honorable to wait till the Squire arose, and, acquainting him with the discovery of the sliding panel, leave the further prosecution of the search to him?

But, no; this might be to injure the bearer of the note; to cut off all further communication with Letty, who might have excellent reasons for what she had done; and this suggestion, therefore, was negatived.

Yet, as he stepped softly onward, he was haunted with an unpleasant recollection of the terrible earnestness with which Eleanor Haydon had addressed him in the library. She had told him then, with evident sincerity, that there were shameful secrets in the life of Mr. Penruan—secrets which he, of course, had no right to make any attempt to unvail. Was it not possible that he was now on the brink of penetrating to that part of the house which he had been warned that he must not enter?

But, on the other hand, he was not endeavoring, or, indeed, wishing to learn anything it did not concern him to know. He was but gratifying a very natural desire to discover in what way his chamber was approached by some person who was not, as far as he knew, connected with the Penruan family; and, after a little hesitation, he pushed back the bolts, and slid the wainscot aside.

It moved slowly, as though it had not been stirred for years; but as it gradually gave to the powerful shoulder of Max, he caught the glimpse of a human foot, cased in leather, as if some person had detected his approach, and was standing ready to grapple with him as soon as the opening was wide enough.

It was, therefore, in a defensive attitude that he advanced a step, then retreated again in some confusion. The foot he had discerned was only one of the high boots the Squire donned when he went out riding, and on a chair, close by, were tossed the clothes that gentleman had worn at dinner. Through a half-opened door floated the unmusical sounds of prolonged nasal snores—sufficient proofs, if there had been none other, that the explorer had unwittingly penetrated to the private apartments of his host. Almost afraid to meditate any further discoveries, the half-laughing, half-vexed Max returned toward his own room; but ere he reached it, he had reminded himself that the other portion of the passage was still unexplored, and that it was by this route the female whose shadow he beheld must have departed.

Accordingly he proceeded to traverse the opening that lay on his left, moving slowly and cautiously, and carefully examining the walls as he went. But all was blank and bare until he reached a door that was locked on the other side.

Max knelt down and put his ear to the keyhole; not a sound could be heard. He ventured to tap for admittance, but no one came. Must his adventure end here? Was he never to know more than this, and always be at the mercy of whoever chose to make use of the passage for the purpose of visiting his chamber?

Taking out his pocket knife he attempted to push back the lock, and, after a while, was successful. The door flew open, and he found himself in a small, square chamber, so peculiar in its arrangements that he was completely mystified.

The boards were so richly carpeted, that the foot sunk into the velvet pile and made no sound; the walls, which were unbroken by window or fire-place, were covered from floor to ceiling with gayly-colored pictures; the fruit-pieces of Lance side by side with groups of bright plumaged birds and flower paintings. But neither landscape nor portrait were here, save one exquisite little miniature of a delicate-looking, middle-aged man, which Max recognized as the *fac-simile* of a likeness of her first husband, which Mrs. Penruan sometimes wore in a locket.

There was no furniture in this room with the exception of a large pile of silken cushions that lay in disorder in the center of it. In one corner, broken and dusty, there was a heap of children's toys; in another, a quantity of ribbons of all hues, their gay colors faded as if they had lain there for years. Half hidden among the cushions already mentioned, Max discerned a huge folio, which he drew from its concealment, and opened. It was an old edition of "Foxe's Book of Martyrs," with illustrations of the sufferings of those who died for their faith, so hideous that he shuddered as he gazed!

Turning with horror from an engraving of a mother on the rack, whose child a pagan governor was about to dash on the stones at his feet, Max flung down the book, marveling at the strange circumstance that this was the only volume in this strange room.

His next glance around it showed that it was lighted from above by sashes filled with clouded glass. Besides the door by which he entered, and which the pictures that hung over it concealed as soon as it was closed, there was one other, half glass, as if it led to a court or garden. But it was shuttered from without, locked, and the key was gone; nor were his efforts to open it as successful as they had been with the first one. Here, then, his discoveries must end, and what had he learned? Nothing more than the existence of an oddly arranged apartment, communicating, by means of a long passage, with his own. Whether it was ever occupied, in what part of the Abbey it was situated, and for whom it had been hung with pictures, and carpeted so carefully, he could not even surmise.

Baffled and disappointed, he prepared to retrace his steps, reminding himself that ere the day was over he might learn more from the sweet lips of Letty. She at least could tell him to whom she had intrusted her letter, and why it was so secretly delivered.

But as he was about to pass through the doorway, an upward glance showed him that there was a small shelf above it. On this shelf there lay two articles, which some inexplicable feeling impelled him to take down and examine.

The one was a gentleman's riding-whip of antique make, the handle plated with tarnished silver, heavily loaded, and incrusted with dark stains, that made Max shake his head gravely as he returned it to its place. The other article was a mass of what looked like unspun silk, but which proved, on closer inspection, to be tresses of soft, fair hair, that appeared as if they had been hastily shorn from the head of a child, and knotted together with a piece of ribbon. On these blonde tresses there were the same crimson stains; and, with a chill creeping over him, he knew not why, Max shook off a curl that had twined itself round his fingers, and hastened back to his chamber

A long, brisk walk, during which he learned from a laborer, that Trevor Wood was the identical coppice into which he had tracked the woman Esther, enabled him to shake off all the outward signs of the wakeful night he had passed. Captain Renton went away after breakfast, to pay farewell calls to some acquaintances, for his resolution to leave England had been strengthened by half a dozen words with Eleanor, whom he was beginning to regard as the most heartless of women. The young lady herself had been weeping when, a couple of hours after his departure, she descended to the morning room to give Max the interview he had requested; but it was only the dark rings around her eyes that betrayed this. With a fortitude Max could not but admire, even while it provoked him, she smiled and chatted on indifferent topics as readily as usual.

"Now, sir," she said, presently, "tell me why you wished to see me, in as few words as possible, for I am in a tremendous hurry. I have neglected all my cottage pensioners since you have been here, and it is my intention to make them a round of visits this very morning."

"You can take me with you, and we will talk as we go," answered Max, who did not feel inclined to discuss Mr. Penruan under his own roof.

"And give occasion for gossip to all the old women in this parish and the next. No, thank you, my good cousin! I prefer to pay my charitable calls alone.

"Then let us adjourn to your favorite cave," he urged. "The house is stifling, and we are so liable to be interrupted here."

To this Eleanor agreed, and very few words were spoken until they were seated *vis-a-vis* in the cool grotto. Then, eying her companion closely, she observed, with a half laugh, "You are growing quite mysterious, cousin Max! How is that?"

"I might answer that the atmosphere of Penruan has infected me; but indeed, I did not intend to be odd, only to secure your attention where I feel that I can speak freely, and without any fear of being overheard."

"Why should you fear this?" she inquired.

"Because I may be suspecting a person unjustly, and therefore should regret to express these suspicions to any ears but yours."

"It is Mr. Penruan to whom you allude. Are you beginning to find him out?" Eleanor demanded, with suppressed eagerness.

"I do not know," was the dubious reply. "It pains me to be obliged to think ill of any one; especially a relative, who has shown me some kindness."

Eleanor's lip curled scornfully, but she did not speak, and Max went on with increasing earnestness and gravity.

"If, in my thoughts, I do him injustice, put aside your own prejudices, and help me to know him better. You don't know what it is to come to the land of your fathers, to find only one friendly hand extended in welcome; and then have your grateful sense of this solitary kindness marred by a dread that the person who offers it is not playing fair."

"It is the way of the world," Eleanor said, with a sigh. "Every one pursues their own course, careless who suffers by it."

"It is not my way!" Max sturdily retorted. "I am growing quite confused by the tangled threads that cross my path wherever I turn. We have our faults in California; we are hot and quarrelsome and boorish; but we have no concealments, no cross-purposes, in what we say and do. Even our women, if they coquette awhile, and will not say, 'I love you' with their lips, avow it with their eyes, and do not drive a faithful heart to despair."

Eleanor put up her finger warningly.

"You are transgressing, sir; you promised to speak only of yourself."

"And *you*," Max added. "Well, then, to my questions, and I pray you to give me straightforward answers, or none at all."

"The subject—if it embraces the dealings of Mr. Penruan—will be such a crooked one," she commented, "that I must not promise too much. But to this I will pledge myself—to give no coloring of my own to the acts of my step-father. You shall have plain, hard truth, and nothing more."

CHAPTER XVIII.

PERSONAL TO MR. PENRUAN.

THE Californian looked earnestly at Eleanor. He was in doubt what to think of her words, and somewhat indisposed to hear anything prejudicial to Mr. Penruan's character; but he said, "Tell me, then, this: are you aware that Mr. Penruan appears—recollect, I only say appears—anxious that you should marry?—and forgive me for speaking as I should if you really were a dear sister."

Eleanor's beautiful face flushed, and her breath came in quick passionate gasps. But she quickly composed herself.

"For your friendly interest I am too grateful to quarrel at the way in which you evince it. Yes, I have known for some time past that my marriage would give pleasure to my step-father."

"Charlie Renton believes that this is because the Squire sympathizes with him, and would rather see you united to a poor man than unhappy," Max then took courage to tell her.

The young lady bit her lip, and, looking her companion steadily in the face, queried, "And you—do you think so too?"

"I scarcely know. To me Mr. Penruan has spoken as if he should not oppose your wishes, *let your choice fall on whom it may!*"

"Go on," cried Eleanor. "But I know the rest; I know that what Mr. John Penruan has said to Captain Renton he has also said to you *and others*. That he has advised you, if not in plain terms, yet by hints and inuendoes, to woo me; and when you, in your honesty, reminded him that I am an heiress, he pooh-poohed the scruples that made you hesitate."

This was so true that Max could only ask, "How did you learn this?"

"I have learned yet more," she answered. "I know that it was to play you off against poor Charlie that he invited you to remain at the Abbey. You were to be domesticated with me; to be the companion of my walks and drives; not because he was hospitably desirous of making your stay here a pleasant one, but to further his own schemes."

"Stay!" Max exclaimed. "You promised that you would not let your own dislike of Mr. Penruan color your explanations!"

"Very well," she replied; "then solve the riddle yourself. Here am I—the heiress of forty thousand pounds and some contingencies—penned up in an obscure corner of England, enjoying none of those advantages the possession of such a fortune should secure one; never visiting London; rarely entering into the society of my country neighbors; in fact, positively vegetating at a ruined abbey, during what should be the gayest, if not the happiest, years of my life. Why is this? Answer me if you can."

"Mrs. Penruan's delicate health may be the cause," Max dubiously suggested.

"Mamma never fancied herself ill until she was secluded here, and had nothing else to do. Change of air and scene would make her a different creature."

"But even you must allow that Mr. Penruan is a devoted husband; that his anxiety on his lady's account is very great, and exceedingly praiseworthy?"

"Yes," said Eleanor dryly. "*Even I* am quite ready to admit that my step-father's fears lest his wife should *die* are excessive; but praiseworthy, did you add? Shall I tell you why mamma's life is so precious to her husband?"

"Yes," said Max, "if you are sure that you are not mistaken in your judgment."

"Oh, stubborn Americano!" she exclaimed with a smile. "Will you have nothing but bare facts? Here they are, then, and you shall draw your own conclusions. If my mother's death was to take place *under present circumstances*, Mr. Penruan would lose all interest in her property."

"He has this estate!"

"Yes," said Eleanor; "but at the time he married it was so heavily mortgaged, that, despite his careful economy, he has not yet paid off all these incumbrances, and my mother's income is wholly in her own hands."

Max sat and mused for a few minutes.

"Then you would have me think that it is solely for the sake of the hateful money that my kinsman watches so assiduously over his wife? The idea is too degrading! I had rather not entertain it!"

"You prefer to regard him as the most uxorious of husbands! Very well; I have no objection. I have often wished that I could do so myself."

"And why," exclaimed the young man, reverting to the topic from which they had strayed—"why should we doubt Mr. Penruan's good intentions toward you?"

"And yet that youdo doubt them this question is a sufficient proof!" she retorted significantly.

"Cannot you be generous, then, and set those doubts at rest?" said Max. "At present you are but increasing the distrust I am so anxious to fling off. Surely you must have the key to Mr. Penruan's motive for giving encouragement both to Captain Renton and myself!"

"Nay," she answered, looking down; "his reasons for doing this must be patent to yourself. He would be rid of me; he cares not who takes me off his hands; and thinks that I may be compelled, by Charles Renton's jealous urgency, into the decisive step of becoming his wife or—yours."

"And you, Eleanor, is it solely to plague, I may say to spite your unloving step-father, that you make the warm-hearted young fellow who loves you so miserable? Is this kind? Is this right?"

She locked her hands together, and burst into passionate tears.

"It is because I love him too well to be a clog to him that I drive him from me! Spare me these cruel reproaches, Mr. Haveryng! Do I not suffer, think you, when I renounce the hopes that—that—"

She buried her face in her handkerchief, and could say no more; Max sitting and watching her in pitying yet perplexed silence, till she grew calmer.

"Is our conference at an end?" she asked, with an attempt to smile: "or have you more confessions to extort? Recollect that you will not be justified in repeating anything I have admitted."

"I am still in the dark," he replied. "How could you be a burden to Charles Renton?"

"In this way. *You think* that I should bring him a fortune, and *I know* that I should bring him nothing. He has his pay as a junior captain in the army, and, by a prudence admirable in a young man so much esteemed and sought after, he contrives to keep out of debt. But to marry—and marry a girl whose tastes are expensive—who has been reared in luxury, and knows economy only to detest it in the sordid shape of John Penruan, would be madness. I refuse to drag Captain Renton down to abject poverty. I will never, never give him reason to rue the day he first beheld me, as many a wretched wife has done."

"But your own lips assured me, not long since, that you are richly dowered!"

"Ay, but they neglected to add that your kinsman is my guardian!"

"I have already heard this from the Squire himself," Max interposed. "He did not appear to have any wish to conceal it."

"Did he volunteer the information?" Eleanor demanded; and, after a little reflection, the young man was compelled to reply in the negative. "Or did he tell you at the same time," she went on, "that I cannot marry without his consent; that by my father's will I am so wholly at the mercy of the man he believed to be his friend, that if I wed without a formal permission, signed by Mr. John Penruan, I forfeit all claim to my dowry, which lapses to my mother, who is passive in the hands of her wily husband."

"But my kinsman assured me that he would not oppose your wishes."

"Tacitly he might not; but would he give that formal consent without which I should be a penniless bride?"

"How could he withhold it?"

"Easily enough; and the world would commend him for refusing to let his ward unite herself to one who was not her equal in wealth. Would he confess, think you, how he threw us together, and indirectly furthered our wishes until we had gone too far to retreat? On the contrary, he would declare that we had misunderstood him; that my self-will and obstinacy had prevented his interference, and that he was only doing his duty in refusing, etc., etc."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the indignant auditor. "This is but a conjecture on your part. He could not be guilty of such meanness—such unpardonable treachery!"

"Do you think not?" she asked, dryly. "On the one side there are forty thousand pounds; on the other, the happiness of two foolish young people. Will John Penruan study the latter when the former is at stake? You do not know him, cousin Max. He would cut off his right hand for half the amount of my dowry!"

But still Max, agitated and uncomfortable, persisted in saying, "I know not how to credit it! Think of the consequences to himself! Why, he would be disgraced in the eyes of all who knew him!"

"And he would be rich enough to defy public opinion. Besides, my dear coz, you in your simplicity, or inexperience, forget that the mass always side with the strongest. Who will care how Mr. Penruan heaped his riches together so long as he has them? What am I, that any one but a preux chevalier like yourself should care what becomes of me?"

"But he would lose his own self-respect!" cried Max, still harping on the Squire.

"If he has any," interposed Eleanor, who was half inclined to be amused at such sturdy championship of a most unworthy man.

"At least he has a conscience," the young Californian retorted, "and that would warn him that such an act would be a fraud on the orphan intrusted to his guardianship. He is avaricious, I dare say; but when his better feelings are appealed to, he will surely prove more honorable than you imagine."

But at this speech the young girl laughed mockingly.

"Did Mr. Penruan's conscience trouble him when, in the depth of last winter, he thrust a helpless widow and her little ones from their cottage, because, in one of the storms that visited the coast, the brave husband and father lost his life, and the Squire's rent was not forthcoming?"

"Could he do this?" murmured her disgusted hearer.

"Ay; and before the destitute family could find shelter, one of those children died, and the whole neighborhood cried shame on him for his unfeeling conduct. But John Penruan let the dwelling to a better tenant, and laughed at those who boldly reminded him that he would yet have to give an account of his treatment of these unhappy creatures."

"You may have heard an exaggerated account of this affair," said Max.

"But I tell you that I have seen the widow—that I know I am only telling you what actually occurred. Mr. Penruan has no conscience. Where was it when a shrieking child fled before his upraised arm, or knelt to him, pitifully praying for mercy? But no, no, no! I dare not speak of that;" and Eleanor started from the rude bench on which she had been sitting, with her hands pressed to her heaving bosom, and every feature convulsed. "When I recall that scene—when I remember how it ended—I hate myself for living beneath the roof of one so vile, so heartless!"

For a few minutes no sound was heard in the cavern but her sobs; and when she looked up it was to say, "Pray, leave me. I cannot return to the house till I am calmer, and I shall recover myself more quickly alone."

"I cannot bear to quit you thus," Max urged; but as she persisted in wishing it, he was forced to obey.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN TREVOR WOOD WITH LETTY RAYNE.

PENRUAN ABBEY was not an agreeable abode that day, for Mrs. Penruan's dog had paid the penalty of over-feeding and pampering, and expired at her feet. As a matter of course, the lady's grief was excessive; and after blaming every one as the cause of dear Fan-fan's sudden demise, she declared that the shock had nearly killed her, and proceeded to give proof of it by a series of hysterical attacks of the most alarming and noisy character.

Mr. Penruan's uneasiness was almost ludicrous, for he was vibrating between a longing to scold her heartily for making such a ridiculous fuss about a little brute he had always detested, and a dread that if the violent fits in which she lay screaming and gasping were not alleviated, they would end in her becoming seriously ill.

As soon as Max made his appearance he was entreated to ride off to the next town, and hasten the coming of the doctor, for whom two of the men, one after the other, had been already dispatched.

Eleanor hastened to her mother when she returned to the house, and learned what was amiss; but sickened by the childishness of Mrs. Penruan's complaints, she was not sorry when she was angrily dismissed as a heartless creature, who had never known what it was to lose an affectionate pet under such distressing circumstances.

"Oh, mamma!" she could not resist saying, "there are those about you who really need the love and sympathy you have wasted upon a dog! When will you remember this, and not call me heartless for refusing to think that your days should be spent in petting an animal, and nursing imaginary ailments."

A hysterical wail followed her as she made her escape, and shut herself in her own room, where she was only too glad to remain the rest of the day.

The dinner was a mere form, for Captain Renton was still absent; the Squire was out of humor, and revenged himself for his lady's freaks by harrying the servants; and Max sat looking at the clock, the hands of which were nearing the hour appointed for the rendezvous.

As soon as the cloth was withdrawn he excused himself, and hastened to the quiet dell, in whose center rose the clear spring, beside which Letty had promised to meet him.

It was a long half-hour before she appeared, and while he paced to and fro, or sat musing on the edge of the roughly-hewn basin, that received the water, his thoughts were as much of Eleanor Haydon, as of the beautiful girl for whom he waited.

Some things that she had said were still dwelling in his mind painfully, and would not be forgotten. What was that scene of which she declared that she could not trust herself to speak—and who was the child who had been the object of Mr. Penruan's fury? Involuntarily his thoughts connected what he had heard with those tresses of fair hair that he found in the chamber to which he had penetrated only a few hours earlier. Still it was mystery upon mystery—coil within coil; for, whether from a dread of John Penruan's vengeance, or a doubt of the policy of blackening his character to a kinsman, no one was willing to give those explanations Max was so anxious to obtain.

In what had his interview with Eleanor resulted—that interview from which he had hoped to learn so much? In the conviction that the Squire was either the vilest or the most cruelly traduced of men; and though very sorrowfully, very reluctantly, Max was beginning to incline to the former conviction.

He had heard Eleanor's tale, and was racking his brain for ways and means of making her and Charlie Renton happy; but there was something still to be learned, of far greater importance to himself, and that was the history of Letty. She was *his* Letty now—the dear one to whom his troth was plighted—to whom—if possible—he intended to devote the remainder of his life. In confessing that she loved him she had given him a right to know who she was, and what were her reasons for fearing and avoiding John Penruan.

But just as he came to this conclusion, a little figure in black, glided from behind the silver birch that grew, in solitary pride, above the fountain, and Letty, her ordinarily pale face aglow with soft blushes, stood before him.

She looked so pure, so unearthly, as she emerged from the gathering shadows of the twilight, that involuntarily Max sunk on his knee, and pressed his lips to her trembling hand.

"Pray rise," she faltered. "It was not wise of me to come; do not make me regret it still more by such acts of homage as these."

"Why reprove me for what I have done?" he asked, as he drew her to a seat upon the mossy roots of the tree. "I felt, for the moment, as if you were more angel than woman, and behaved accordingly."

"I am no angel," said Letty, hastily.

"But you are a true and loving woman! Is not that what you would add? Why, then, I shall like you best in that character, till my own is perfected."

His arm stole around her as he spoke, but she disengaged herself with gentle firmness from the would-be embrace.

"Mr. Haveryng, this must not be! I do not come to listen to such words as these, but rather to assure you that you must forget me!"

He smiled incredulously.

"And to teach me how to do so? Begin, then! When you have succeeded in making me forget what you confessed to me the other night, the rest may be easy to both of us! But while I remember that you have acknowledged that I am dear to you, my place is by your side, and you are as surely mine as if our vows had been plighted at the altar!"

"You are too rash, sir! You do not know what you are saying! Words spoken in haste, and in the regret of having unjustly condemned you, were not intended to imply all you seem to think."

"Indeed!" said Max, his face darkening with displeasure. "Were you, then, playing with me—amusing yourself by driving me almost to desperation, and then luring me back with a pretense of affection that, after all, you do not feel?"

But Letty's eyes did not droop before his reproachful gaze; on the contrary, she gave him glance for glance, and there was sorrowful bitterness in her tones as she retorted:

"Oh, sir, you need not be so ready to accuse me! Even if I were the coquette you paint, my heart would acquit me of having cost you much unhappiness. It is on every lip how Mr. Max Haveryng has won the belle of Penruan. It is not with Captain Renton that she sings, dances, rides, and lingers by moonlight on the terrace; and already the Squire's tenants are anticipating all the festivities of a gay wedding."

"And you have heard that I am playing the suitor to Eleanor Haydon?" Max demanded, as he got possession of her hands. "I do not doubt it; there are plenty of gossips, even in this out-of-the-way place, who would not be able to see us together without imagining the rest. Let them say what they please; but you, Letty, do you believe that I, whom you saw only the other night half maddened by your coldness, went from your side to whisper loving words in the ear of another?"

She was silent. But this only added fuel to the fire her speech had provoked.

"Letty, you shall answer me! Am I, in your sight, this dishonorable wretch—this mean reptile—or do you say it only to vex me?"

"No one would blame you for forgetting the Widow Rayne, while you sun yourself in the smiles of beautiful, queenly Eleanor."

"Am I answered? Have you really thought this of me? Thought that while I wooed you in secret, I openly sought the love of another? Then you do well in saying that we should meet no more! We are mistaken in each other!"

"Mistaken!" she echoed, regarding his hot, angry look doubtfully.

"Yes! I could have staked my life that you loved me—that, in spite of the efforts your friends, as you call them, have made to keep us apart, you had given your heart as freely to my keeping, as I gave mine to you. I have never said, 'On whom do you smile when I am absent, Letty—for whom are your kisses when I am not near?'"

"You dared not suspect me!" she panted.

"And yet you have suspected me!" he reminded her. "But no, I never said these things, because I never thought them; I gauged your feelings by my own, and fancied that we had unbounded faith in each other. But it is not so, and, therefore, you cannot love me!"

"Think this if you will," she murmured, with a sigh. "I did but come to say adieu forever; and it will make our parting easier."

"To you, perhaps; but to me it is torture! Why did you send me from you the other night, half delirious with joy; repeating to myself, as I went, 'She is mine—she loves me!' if it were but to deceive me?"

"It is not I who have wavered in my affections, but you!" she retorted, accusingly.

"It is false, even though it is you who say it!" was the vehement reply.

"Are not you protesting too loudly, sir?" Letty demanded, as she curved her white throat, with the haughty air that gave dignity to her figure. "When a gentleman whispers soft words to one who professes to be nothing better than the adopted child of a Cornish fisherman, no one will wonder if he does not mean all he says."

"Where did you learn those despicable lessons?" he sternly demanded. "And what have I done that gives you reason to class me with such scoundrels as you describe? I am no gentleman, according to your meaning of the word, for though an idler here, I do my best at home to improve my small patrimony, and follow in the steps of the father who bequeathed it to me. No man can say that he wronged human creature, and it shall be his son's boast to deserve the same!"

"Have I not already said that no one will blame you if, in the bright orbs and glowing cheeks of Eleanor Haydon, you discover charms that I have never possessed?" Letty made answer. "And now, Mr. Haveryng, we will not prolong this interview. It was folly to meet at all, seeing that no good purpose could be served by it; and I have only displeased you with my candor."

But Max was now too deeply moved for speech. With arms folded on his chest, he stood intently gazing on her, and beneath that steady look her own sunk, and her color began to come and go.

"Farewell, Mr. Haveryng!"

There was a ring of trouble, almost of supplication, in her voice, but he made no sign of having heard it. She moved away a step or two, then paused, and glanced over her shoulder. His eyes were still fixed upon her receding form, but he made no effort to recall her. There was a fund of firmness or obstinacy—call it what you will—in the Californian, that would not let him stoop to protest any longer; nor strive by unmanly supplications to regain her confidence.

Wavering between love and pride, she made another uncertain step toward the trees, then wrung her hands, and, with a sob, fled back to the arms that instantly opened to receive her. But pain and displeasure still sat on the Californian's brow, and he did not attempt to conceal it.

"What am I to understand by this, Letty? I take you to my heart spite of all you have said, because I must always love you—I cannot help it; but my honor must be vindicated. I must find some way of proving to you, beyond all doubt, that I am not the

villain you have, for the second time, called me, before I can say to you: 'Letty, will you be my wife?'"

"Scold me as much as you please," she sighed, as she nestled closer to him. "I deserve the angriest speeches you can make, for I have been mad—mad with jealousy."

"Who has been slandering me in your hearing?"

"No one; else had I been without excuse? But only this morning, from an eyrie in the cliffs, I watched to catch a glimpse of you, Max, as—as I have often done before—"

"My love! and I knew not that you were so near."

"At last you came—but not alone. She was with you. She leaned upon your arm, smiled in your face, and let you lead her to the cave, which, I have heard them say, she rarely permits any one to enter. I counted the minutes that you spent there together—still together—while I was forgotten."

"No, Letty, not forgotten."

"Well, then, unseen. Minutes, did I say?—an hour had nearly elapsed, and, wild with my own chafing, fretting fears, I stole to a cleft in the rocks, and looked through. Eleanor was sitting in the cave, and you were bending over her so lovingly, that—oh, Max, Max! wicked creature that I am—I wished her *dead!*"

"My foolish darling! though appearances were against me, there was not a word uttered by either of us that you might not have heard. My cousin Eleanor is unhappy; and Charles Renton, who loves her dearly, is my friend. I would help them both, if I knew how; and it was to try and learn some way of doing this that I talked with her this morning."

Letty raised her head, and began to look gravely curious.

"The bright, lively Eleanor Haydon unhappy? How is this?"

"I may not tell her secrets without her leave—even to you, my lily-flower," said Max; and her face was sinking down upon his breast again, when a long, plaintive cry, like the call of the screech-owl, echoed through the wood.

"I have outstayed my time," she mournfully observed.

"Nay, you must not go yet! I have so much to ask and say!" exclaimed her dismayed lover.

"And I have wasted the precious moments in reproaches!" sighed Letty. "But I entreat you not to detain me!"

She spoke so beseechingly, that he could not but comply.

"At least I may see you safely through the wood?"

She hesitated; then answered, "We will walk together to the boundary of the Penruan estate. There our paths divide; and oh! Max, if you love me, make no attempt to follow my footsteps."

"Is this woman you call your aunt cruel to you? Is it because you fear her harshness you say this?"

"No; she is very, very good to me. A little prejudiced, perhaps; but when she knows you better, she will overcome this. Only yield to my entreaties, and all may yet be well."

They were now rapidly threading the intricacies of the coppice, with which Letty appeared so familiar that she never hesitated which way to take, although beneath the trees it was so dark that no path could be discerned.

And now they stood on a patch of open ground beneath a bank that surrounded the Abbey plantations, and with a sigh, she paused to say farewell.

But ere the word could pass her lips, or Max could extract a promise that she would soon see him again, a man scrambled over the bank, and sliding down it, stood before them so suddenly that Letty's cry of dismay was natural enough. But was it her alarm that evoked it, or the explanation of Max, to whose lips had involuntary risen the words, "It is Mr. Penruan!"

CHAPTER XX.

MAX GROWS ANGRY AS WELL AS PERPLEXED.

Max could feel that the clasp of Letty's hands tightened on his arm, and that she was quivering from head to foot, while the Squire peered suspiciously first at one and then the other of the young couple he had contrived to startle. But it relieved him to find that she quickly recovered herself, and checked that impulse to fly which had seized her on Mr. Penruan's first appearance.

Did this gentleman give any sign that he recognized the young widow, who had testified such a dread of encountering him?

No. But then the fast fading light was uncertain; and Letty, before leaving the wood, had drawn forward the hood of her cloak, so as to partially conceal her face. The eyes must have been very keen, or very well acquainted with her form and features, that could have discerned who she was under such circumstances; and perhaps it was a consciousness of this that gave her courage to quickly return to her place beside her lover. But whatever Mr. Penruan may have thought or suspected with regard to his kinsman's muffled and silent companion, he soon made it apparent that his curiosity was thoroughly awakened.

"I beg your pardon if I came upon you too suddenly," he said, in fawning tones. "I had no idea, my good Max, that you were here, or else—"

"Well, sir?" queried Max, who was irritated by the determined manner in which the Squire had planted himself on the path, thus rendering it impossible for Letty to pass. "I am told that this wood is free to all comers."

"Oh, yes; that is, the people about here claim a right of way, which, if it were my property, I should soon set about contesting. I've no notion of strangers wandering at will over another man's estates!"

"Will you walk on, Mr. Penruan?—we are in haste!" said Max, abruptly.

The Squire wheeled round.

"You're going back to the Abbey? Then we'll walk together, for I cannot remount that bank."

"It's a pity you ever got over it," was the not very politely spoken comment of his annoyed kinsman.

"It was; but I heard voices, and fancied I recognized Eleanor's. This is not Eleanor, though, is it?" And he made another attempt to get a fuller view of Letty's half averted face.

But Max prevented it by pushing himself betwixt them.

"I left Miss Haydon in the house, where I dare say we shall find her on our return."

"I heard voices," the Squire resumed, "and it struck me as being so unusual at such an hour, that I really felt myself justified in coming to see whether poachers, or other bad characters, were lurking so close to my own land. I must repeat, however, that I am extremely sorry if I have frightened the—the lady."

But Letty was gone. Just as he began to speak, she withdrew her hand from Max's arm, slid her fingers into his for a mute pressure, and, breathing a warning "Hush!" glided away among the trees.

Her sudden departure afforded fresh food for Mr. Penruan's curiosity; but there was a certain something in the tones of the Californian's voice that warned him not to ask too many questions.

"I really am very sorry I intruded upon you, Max."

"So am I, sir!" was the curt reply.

"But then you must remember that you had not taken me into your confidence; that I was not aware you ever indulged in flirtations with our Cornish lasses."

Max was feigning an indignant disclaimer, when the recollection that Letty wished to avoid recognition checked him. He would not say a word that might give the Squire a clew to her identity, and his answer therefore was carefully framed so as to avoid it.

"Few men are in a hurry to reveal their love-affairs to their relatives, and I shouldn't think of troubling you with mine."

"I did not recognize your fair companion," said Mr. Penruan, suggestively.

"Indeed!" was all the answer he received; and he started on a fresh tack.

"What would Eleanor say if she knew that you play the gallant, gay Lothario in the twilight to some pretty lass from St. Erne?"

"Now you speak of Miss Haydon," cried Max, swallowing his indignation at the remark, "perhaps you will answer a question or two that I should like to put to you?"

"My dear boy, I have already told you that if good wishes are of any service to you in your suit, you have mine."

"But, Mr. Penruan, you have said nearly the same words to Charles Renton! Your good wishes cannot be with both of us!"

"Why not?" said the imperturbable Squire. "I am very well aware that you cannot both wed my saucy step-daughter, but I may and do like both of you well enough to rejoice in aught that makes either of you happy."

Max pondered awhile, and then bluntly said: "This may be an impartial, but it is also rather an enigmatical speech. Tell me in plain words, Mr. Penruan, whether, in the event of Miss Haydon's choice falling on Captain Renton or myself, you will give that written sanction to the marriage, without which I am assured that the young lady would be a portionless bride?"

"My dear Max," the Squire replied, importantly, "I shall most certainly endeavor to do my duty. This is an affair in which my own feelings and inclinations may have to be entirely set aside, and my functions, as Eleanor Haydon's guardian, strictly exercised; but when the moment arrives, I shall be ready for it. In the meantime, I repeat that my wishes are with you. Renton is an amiable young fellow, but you, Max—you are of my own blood."

"I scarcely catch your meaning, sir. What shall you consider it your duty to do under such circumstances?"

Mr. Penruan coughed dubiously.

"Has Eleanor sent you to me?" he asked. "Are you authorized by her to put these questions?"

Max was obliged to answer in the negative, although a suspicion of the triumphant smile the avowal brought to his auditor's thin lips provoked him sorely.

"She did *not* send you to me? Then, my dear young friend, I really think these inquiries are premature. From any person but yourself I should be inclined to resent them; I should, indeed. Of course, I know you too well to suspect you of harboring avaricious sentiments, or a greater interest in Eleanor's fortune than her own pretty self; but, really—"

"I think you had better stop there, Mr. Penruan," Max sternly exclaimed. "As long as I am your guest, I am bound in honor to avoid quarreling with you, which I certainly shall be forced to do if you say any more."

"Pooh! nonsense, you hot-headed boy!" Mr. Penruan smilingly retorted. "You must rid yourself of this Californian habit of looking knives and talking daggers every time one contrives to affront you. And seriously, Max, we must not part in ill-will. You are the only relative I have in the world. I am getting an old man, with nerves shaken by—by many anxieties. If any great trouble were to overtake me, I should want some one to stand by me; and who so strong, so capable of doing this, as you?"

"In everything that is just and right you may count on my assistance, sir," said Max, touched a little by this appeal. "But what troubles can you dread?"

Mr. Penruan sighed heavily.

"I don't know. A foreboding comes over me sometimes—I suppose most men are occasionally plagued with such fancies—and mine always attack me after I have dreamed one peculiar dream, about groping my way through some dark cavern, tormented and mocked by the evil spirits that have dragged me there. Oh! it is a hideous vision, and I wake from it bathed in sweat, and shivering with fear!"

"Do you walk in your sleep when you dream this?" asked Max, eagerly.

"Surely no," Mr. Penruan responded, evincing more uneasiness at the question than it seemed to merit. "If I did, how terrible—how dangerous! I mean what dangers I might incur! What made you think of this?"

"Merely a passing idea. I thought it not at all unlikely—that is all," was the evasive answer.

Max had hesitated for a moment whether to relate what he had seen, or still keep silence respecting the Squire's somnambulism. It was his increasing distrust of his kinsman that inclined him to the latter course, and Mr. Penruan remained in ignorance that, as far as the mocking spirit was concerned, his dream was not all a dream.

By this time they had reached the Abbey, and the Squire went indoors; but Max remained on the terrace to smoke and meditate. The more he did so, the hotter grew his dissatisfaction with his kinsman

"Eleanor was right, and he is as mean, as crafty, as unreliable as she described him. How cunningly, how cautiously he fenced with my questions; admitting just as much as left him a loophole for escape, and no more. I can no longer doubt that he makes her home detestable in order to drive her into matrimony, and will then sanctimoniously declare that it would not be doing his duty to consent to her union with any one whose position is inferior to her own. Is there no matching him with his own weapons? Must this young couple, who love each other so warmly, either separate altogether, or consent to endure with the poverty which would press sharply on both? Surely there must be some way of preventing either of these sorrowful terminations to their wooing?"

Then Max reminded himself that he had another cause for complaint anent the Squire, and one that touched him more closely. By those spying propensities, which made Mr. Penruan a terror to his dependants, who never knew whe or how he would pounce upon them, he had driven Letty away before her lover could exact a promise of another meeting, and coax her to fix the time and place for the same. Dan Calynack might be persuaded to convey to her another *billet doux*, but this was so doubtful that Max predicted a stern refusal, even while he resolved to leave nothing untried that might prevail with the old fisherman to oblige him.

As he sauntered to and fro, nursing his wrath, Captain Renton came out and joined him.

"Have you any news for me, Haveryng? I daresay I bore you with my somber looks and selfish anxieties; but you have made me believe you my friend, and you will have to put up with the inevitable consequences."

Max put his arm through the young officer's, and, risking Eleanor's reproof for divulging her secrets, related all he had learned from her during their interview in the fairy grot.

"Her step-father will withhold her fortune; well, what signifies that?" was the impetuous comment. "It is for herself I love her. How could she let the paltry dross come between us?"

"Gently," said Max. "I thought I was the most inconsiderate of men, but before I marry I shall certainly ask myself whether I can make a home for my spouse."

Captain Renton's delight received a check.

"You are right. In the joy of learning that Eleanor still loves me, I forge all else. Why did my friends persuade me to adopt this expensive profession? But my darling shall find that I am not to be daunted by any difficulties while her heart remains true to me. Ah, Haveryng, you don't know half Eleanor's good qualities; you see her under a cloud now, for somehow she never does get on with Mr. Penruan, but she is the most generous and noble of women."

"Only one degree removed from perfection!" exclaimed the laughing Max. "How fortunate it is for my own comfort that I do not see my pretty cousin with your eyes! You knew her in the lifetime of her father. What kind of man was Mr. Haydon?"

"An excellent one. Rather too easily swayed, I fancy, but dotingly fond of his wife and children."

"And yet he made a will that savors of injustice, by putting too much power in the hands of Mr. Penruan! How do you account for this?"

"I cannot tell," replied Renton, cautiously lowering his voice. "You must remember that when Mr. Haydon gave up his appointment at Madras, and came to England for his health, I lost sight of the family for some years. When we met again, Eleanor had sprung from a merry child into a beautiful, high-spirited woman, and her mother had re-married with Mr. Penruan."

"How came such a marriage about?" mused Max.

"On this point I can only tell you what I have heard from gossiping acquaintances, for Eleanor has always carefully avoided the subject. Mr. Haydon was recommended by his physicians to take up his residence on the south-west coast. He came to Mount's Bay, and somehow contrived to strike up a friendship with John Penruan, who became so useful to him during his illness, that, as a proof of his confidence, Mr. Haydon made him one of the trustees of his bequests; and, in gratitude, I suppose, for his attentions to her departed husband, the widow married him about six months after her bereavement."

"And this gave him unlimited power over the future of her daughter."

"Say of her fortune, not of her future!" Renton retorted, a glow of enthusiastic devotion pervading both tone and look. "With Heaven's blessing on my endeavors, she shall never know a sorrow again that I can shield her from."

"But, my dear fellow, you surely are not going to be so imprudent as to urge her to marry you at all risks?"

"Certainly not: but I shall ask Eleanor to give me time to prove my sincerity; a year, or *two*, if she insists upon it. Then I will sell my commission, and with the few hundreds I shall have, and an energetic determination to get on, what may not a man achieve?"

At first, Max was strongly inclined to answer, "Perhaps nothing," but he was too good-natured to willingly damp the lover's ardor, or remind Charles Renton that life in a dashing regiment was very different to the hardships that must be endured by one who resolutely sets himself to make a fortune.

"Better act on Eleanor's own suggestion," he said, "and go with me to Aquas Dolces. My life on it she will be true to you, though your one year's absence will, in all probability, spin itself out to six or seven."

"Six or seven!" the young officer repeated, in dismay. "I could not expect her—so young and beautiful as she is—to wait for me all that time."

"If she loves you as well as I think she does, her patience will stand the test!" cried Max, hopefully; "and though you must prepare yourself for a fair share of roughing and knocking about, you will have one friend by your side, old fellow, who will do his utmost to help you!"

The young men cordially clasped hands.

"I shall thankfully accept your offer," said Renton, "unless the propitious fates give me something to do in my own country. There are men in town who profess to be my friends, and who have the

power, if the *will* be not wanting, to procure me a berth under Government. With a settled income—however small—in my possession, I should be justified in marrying at once. Do you not think so?"

"Ay; but will Miss Haydon consent to take a step that will compel her to resign all hope of enjoying the dower that should have been hers?"

"Eleanor is no lover of money!" Max was proudly told.

"Very true; but, were I in her place, it would cost me a pang to throw into the hands of such a man as Mr. Penruan the large sum my own father had carefully, and perhaps fondly, gathered together for his child."

"Whatever you may think, don't use these arguments to Eleanor!" Captain Renton exclaimed, anxiously. "Perish the money! I have not the slightest desire to be beholden to my wife for the luxuries on my table. Such a dowry would have smoothed away many difficulties, but others have been happy without forty thousand pounds, and why not my love and I?"

He bade Max good-night, and went away to his own room in better spirits than he had been able to muster since he came to Penruan. His jealous doubts had vanished; and when Eleanor had been persuaded to lay aside all reserves, all scruples, and pledge herself to be his as soon as he was in a position to claim her, what further incentive would be needed to make him go boldly forth and do his utmost to win wealth, or at least a competence, for her to share?

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH THE CAPTAIN AND ELEANOR COME TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

It appeared, however, by what took place, that Max interpreted Eleanor's sentiments more correctly than her lover had done. During the long conversation Captain Renton contrived to have with her, she was induced to confess that it was her dread of becoming a burden upon him, and, still worse, a blight to his prospects, that had led her to hide her own emotions, and endeavor to repel him by a pretence of capricious indifference.

"I should not have avowed this," she added, "if my cousin Max had not taken upon himself to make such revelations to you that it would be folly to deny the truth; for indeed, Charlie, I have felt all along that it would be better to let you go away believing me a heartless coquette, than to do or say anything that will lead you to indulge in hopes that are never likely to be realized."

But nothing would make the happy lover think with her.

"My dearest Eleanor, why take that desponding view of our difficulties? Is it because you doubt my perseverance? Do you think I shall grow weary of working to make a home for my bright, brave darling?"

"It will be quite excusable if you do," she answered, with one of her merry laughs; "for another half-a-dozen years spent in constant warfare with my step-father will have converted me into a spiteful, miserable vixen, with a red nose and an unbearable temper. I am no dove now; so what I shall be by that time I shudder to imagine; and I should advise you to be warned in time, and not dare the danger."

"You will always be the dear, dear Eleanor I have loved from my boyhood," he fondly told her.

"And who, in those happy days, used to give you smart slaps whenever you offended her! Ah, Charlie, Charlie! take a lesson from the reminiscences, and don't run away with the idea that I shall ever be a submissive wife!"

"I'll risk that, or anything else, so that I have your promise to be mine!"

"Twenty or thirty years hence, do you mean? No, no, dear friend; there shall not be the shadow of an engagement to fetter you. I knew you would wish this, but it must not be! I have done a very foolish thing in owning that I like—well, *love* you; but I'll not do a worse one!"

"And why not, Eleanor? If you have faith in me, as you say you have, why not give me the inexpressible consolation of knowing that, as soon as I succeed in procuring a regular income—even though it be but a small one—you will make me happy."

"And poor!" she added. "A troubled, dispirited man, condemned to drudge at a desk all your days, for a pittance that would hardly suffice, when earned, to pay the butcher and the baker, and the endless items of domestic expenditure."

"I never knew that you attached so much importance to wealth," he said, vexedly.

"Neither do I, for myself; but for you, Charlie—oh! can't you understand that it would be my pride, my joy to give you anything, everything, it lay in my power to bestow? and that I shrink from the thought that if I yielded to your prayers *now*, you might on some future day murmur in my hearing, 'It is through my foolish love for you that I am so needy and harassed!'"

"Could I ever be so ungenerous? Do me more justice, Eleanor; or if your predictions are to be realized, and, in spite of my struggles, I never attain wealth or fame, are there not possessions far dearer to a man's heart than those? I have a friend in the regiment who has had many and severe trials; who is even now economizing in every way to pay off a debt incurred for a thoughtless brother; and my friend's wife is in such delicate health that she can rarely quit her sofa. Yet I have seen such looks of tender love and confidence pass between this couple. I know so well that, in spite of sickness and poverty, they are happy in each other, that—"

"That you will end in converting me," cried Eleanor, dashing away a tear. "But I must not let you do this, for I should most assuredly repent it as soon as it was too late to retract."

"My love!" he exclaimed, reproachfully; but she put her hand over his lips.

"Now, Charlie, have done with protestations for awhile, and be contented to know that if I do not marry you, I will never marry any one else. Hush, sir; no thanks. The concession is not worth much, as you will acknowledge when you have heard me out, for I am thoroughly determined not to come to you dowerless."

"Then you have hopes of prevailing with Mr. Penruan to sanction our union?"

"Not a hope," she retorted. "On the contrary, I feel convinced that my much-coveted forty thousand pounds will never quit his coffers, if by art and subterfuge he can keep it in them."

"Then why do you make a resolution that positively separates us?" the captain demanded.

"Because that money is rightly, justly mine—the dying gift of one of the best of parents, although the man who pretended to be his friend seeks to withhold it from me by a fraud that my dearest father never dreamed of; and I will never, by act of my own, enable John Penruan to wrest it from me!"

"This is precisely what Max Haveryng declared that you would say; but I, Eleanor—I hoped that your love for me would be stronger than your desire to defy Mr. Penruan."

"I cannot help it if I seem unkind," she answered. "But were I to become yours, every time you had a wish ungratified, I should say to myself, 'Had I what a rogue withholds, this need not be.' However, this is purely a personal matter. I am so constituted that I cannot resolve to make my step-father a present of the forty thousand pounds that should be mine and yours; and yet I love you dearly, Charlie."

"If this be all," he said, when he had kissed her for the tender avowal—"if this be all, my love—"

"But it is not. I have duties here which I cannot set aside even for your sake. There is my mother to be considered."

"Nay, love; Mrs. Penruan cannot feel herself aggrieved by your marriage," Captain Renton objected.

"Possibly not; for she likes you, Charlie. She is your friend and champion on all occasions."

"And she can do without you so much better than I can, darling. She has her home, her husband—"

"And her pet ailments," said Eleanor, with a slight smile. "I know that she would not miss me much. After our parting, she would soon contrive to make herself happy without as with me. She does not comprehend how much she needs my presence."

"Of course she would miss you—who would not? But, indeed, dear, I cannot see in what way she really requires you to remain at the Abbey. In fact—only you must not think me ungenerous in saying this of one who has always received me with so much kindness—Mrs. Penruan strikes me as being too much engrossed in her own symptoms to care very much whether you are with her or not."

Eleanor sighed, but did not contradict him.

"Poor mamma! It saddens me to see how very much imaginary troubles have changed her. But don't you understand that it is precisely because she has grown so inert and credulous, and may easily be frightened into thinking she is dying, that I ought not to leave her?"

Captain Renton shook his head.

"No, love; I must confess that I do not see the force of your arguments."

"Listen, then!"—and Eleanor drew closer to him—"and if I misjudge my hated step-father, may Heaven and you forgive me!"

"I think you are disposed to be hard on Mr. Penruan," the captain so frankly told her, that her bosom heaved with tumultuous emotions, and she could not resist a sarcastic retort.

"I like to hear you pleading for a more merciful interpretation of the sayings and doings of the man whose greed of gold keeps us apart."

"My dearest Eleanor, a poor, fallible mortal may be covetous and miserly, without being utterly a villain."

"Ay; but do you forget that when an evil spirit is once admitted into the heart, it brings others in its train? You think me harsh in my judgment, so does Max Haveryng; for neither of you know all I could tell you, nor have watched John Penruan as closely as I have done. But setting this aside, and allowing that avarice is his worst vice, do you forget how great a temptation I should put before him, by leaving my mother utterly in his power?"

Captain Renton looked perplexed.

"Remember," Eleanor whispered, "that the dowry I should forfeit by wedding without Mr. Penruan's sanction would lapse to my mother, who would be perfectly at liberty to will it, with her own private income, to whom she pleases."

"And she would do you justice, my dearest. She would bequeath it to her child."

"*Would her husband let her do so?* And when influenced by the man whose violence she dreads, and whom she never ventures to oppose, she had willed all to him, how long would she live? Charley, I have an innate conviction that if I selfishly left my mother to the tender mercies of her tyrant, she would soon become the invalid she now fancies herself, and, harassed or frightened by constant unkindness, sink ere long into her grave."

"What a horrible climax you are imagining, my love! I dare not think with you; for if I did, I should be afraid to leave you in the hands of such a monster as Mr. Penruan!"

"Nay; he is no monster—only a crafty, greedy man, fully alive to his own interests, and thinking nothing unfair that will further them. He has, moreover, a temper so violent, that it has sometimes hurried him into deeds one shudders to recall."

"On the whole, then," said Captain Renton, trying to take a more cheerful tone, "our worthy step-father is not a bright specimen of humanity. However, before we set him down as totally base and irreclaimable, I will go lay my proposals before him. If I do obtain a positive statement of his intentions—that is, a plain yes or no to my request to be accepted as your suitor—we will both of us think well of him for the rest of our lives."

"He will only fence with and evade you," sighed Eleanor; "I am convinced of it!"

"And if he does, what then? *You* will not send me from you without some sweet hope to dwell upon, will you, my precious one? Only promise that you will be mine at some future day, and I will try to be satisfied with that pledge until you can give me a more definite one."

Betwixt smiles and tears, Eleanor first said she would think of it, and, when more closely pressed, murmured the assurance her lover demanded.

"It is wrong—I know it is!" she vehemently declared, a minute after. "I am binding you down to a long engagement; and instead of doing my utmost to forget you, and content myself with exasperating Mr. Penruan and breaking the spirit of Ursa Minor, I shall be fretting over our position. If I could but have sent you from me free to woo some more fortunate creature, I should have been reconciled by time to the separation. As it is, you will go to California with Max Haveryng, and lead such a harum-scarum, Robinson Crusoeish life in his wild country, that it's doubtful whether you'll bring your proper complement of limbs back to England!"

"Never mind, love; I shall bring to you the same devotion to my Eleanor that now fills my heart; and if I leave you for awhile, how sweet will be the welcome you will have for me when I return!"

"Even if you come in high boots and a beard, and I find it impossible to recognize the dashing exquisite who used to saunter along the shady side of Pall Mall in regimentals! Ah, Charlie! I try to jest, but my spirits are sinking lower and lower as I recognize how completely I am the disturbing element of your existence. But for me, you would have gone placidly on in the same groove, happy and respected. Now you are thoroughly unsettled, and led to contemplate engaging in efforts which, should they end in failure—"

But the captain would not listen any longer, and he talked so hopefully, that if Eleanor could not share his pleasant anticipations, she forbore to damp them by her discouraging speeches.

Ere they parted, it was agreed that Captain Renton should pursue his original intention of trying to obtain some tangible promise from Mr. Penruan. If he failed, he proposed returning to town immediately, and trying what influence in his behalf his friends would bring to bear on men in office.

"You will stay and watch over my interests here, will you not, Haveryng?" he asked, when Max had been admitted into his plans. "I shall be more content about Eleanor if I know that she has some friend at hand on whom she can rely."

Max pondered awhile before he replied.

"I don't feel quite comfortable about staying at the Abbey now. I cannot help calling its owner, in my own mind, a bit of a rascal, and so I did think of transferring myself to St. Erne; but if you and Miss Haydon wish it, and you think I can be of the smallest use, why, I'll stay here till you return."

"Thanks. If you are sure that this arrangement will not interfere with your own affairs, I shall be glad. And, by-the-by, why not enlist Eleanor's friendship for your pretty widow? I am sure that, for your sake, she would be pleased to pay her any attention in her power."

"I have already named Letty Rayne to my cousin, but she does not know her. Indeed, Eleanor tells me that she so rarely goes to the village, that her knowledge of the people living there is very limited."

"But she will walk to St. Erne with you any day, I am sure."

"Thanks; but at present Letty seems reluctant to make new friends."

And, seeing that there was some constraint in the manner of Max's reply, Captain Renton forbore to say more.

His conference with Mr. Penruan ended in a disappointment. No one could be kinder, no one more profuse in their expressions of good will, than Eleanor's wily guardian. But when closely pressed for his formal consent, he began to retract, and evade a positive reply. He was deeply interested in the happiness of his young friends, he declared, and all that he could do for them *with propriety* he would. *His consent*—why in his heart he had already given that, for he thought them excellently matched. *Would he give it in writing, as the will stipulated?* Well, it would grieve him so dreadfully to refuse it, that they might *almost* depend upon his obliging them, only it would be necessary to consult Mrs. Penruan, as she was his fellow trustee; and though he thought—nay, he felt sure that she would not prove implacable—of course they must understand that he should have to be guided by her wishes.

"Precisely as I expected," said Eleanor, when this was reported to her. "He will talk in this same style until driven into a corner, and then make poor mamma the responsible party. I know to a word what he will say. 'Mrs. Penruan, whose request he is bound to respect, does not consider that it would be right for her daughter to wed a gentleman whose fortune is not equal to her own; and, therefore, he must decline the honor of an alliance with Captain Charles Renton, although he regrets it exceedingly, *et cetera*.' And then he will be hoping in his heart that we shall be romantic enough to run away, and trust to his good nature for the rest."

Compelled to think with his betrothed that this was a quality of which Mr. Penruan possessed so small a share, that it would not be prudent to build many hopes upon it, Captain Renton brought his visit to a sudden termination, and making business his excuse to his host, returned to town. That the Squire was anxious to know the reason of this hasty movement, the questions with which he plied Max betrayed; but the Californian was impenetrable, either parrying these inquiries, or bluntly saying that he did not choose to talk about the affairs of his friends without their permission.

"I see, I see!" retorted Mr. Penruan, with one of his odious chuckles. "The field is clear, and you are too generous to wish to talk about your defeated rival. Make much of your opportunities, my dear boy! Renton is not so near to me as you are, so I may be forgiven for saying that I would rather see you bear Eleanor away in triumph to your American home, than be forced to give her to a millionaire!"

Max bit his lip to keep back a sarcastic retort.

"I must not say anything to get myself turned out of the house until Renton returns," he said to himself; "or else I certainly should dearly like to tell this scheming rascal what I think of him. I have no doubt but what he would like to see me carry Eleanor off—she would be so thoroughly out of his way; but let him look to himself! 'The best laid schemes gang aft aglee,' as Burns tells us, and Mr. Penruan may receive a check before he fingers my pretty cousin's dowry!"

As Eleanor had retreated to her own room after bidding Captain Renton farewell, Max knew that his time, for some hours, at all events, would be at his own disposal. He, therefore, started for old Dan's cottage beneath the cliffs, armed with the note for Letty, which he intended to prevail upon the fisherman to forward.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SQUIRE IN A RAGE.

Daniel Calynack was half inclined to be angry when Max broached his wishes.

"'Tain't no use talking, my son; I can't and I won't ha' no more to do with 'ee. Esther have led me such a life about that last bit o' paper o' thine, that I ha' promised, on the book, never to gi' the poor child another. It went against me, it did, but I was forced to own that she knowed best; and when I'd done that, why, I had to gi' in. Trust a woman for always getting the best of 'ee in a tonguing match."

Finding it useless to argue or entreat, all he said only eliciting that same reply, "I ha' gi'en Esther my word," Max at length desisted, and held out his hand.

"Fare ye well, Dan; I don't know but what I like you better for your obstinacy, although I think you were in error when you made a promise that keeps Letty and I apart. If difficulties or dangers menace my dear little girl, why should I not help her to conquer or escape them?"

"Dear heart, lad, do 'ee think a strong arm and a willing mind will do everything? Because I can tell 'ee that, in that case the poor child needn't 'a' looked further than Daniel Calynack."

Weary of expostulating, or trying to penetrate the mystery that shrouded Letty's affairs, Max made a brief response, and walked away; but the old fisherman, whose heart always warmed toward the frank-faced young fellow he had nursed back to health and strength, followed him down the little garden.

"Ha' ye ever noticed this bit o' sea-gull weed, Mr. Haveryng, that I stuck in against the gate?"

"Not I," was the careless answer.

"Ha'n't ye now?" Letty loves it, because she says it's such an innocent little flower."

Max stopped now, and gathered a handful of the bright little blossoms.

"I ha' pulled it up once or twicet, because it gets in the way of my yarbs," Dan went on; "but it comes peeping out o' the ground again, as if it were detarmined to stay. 'Tis just like the women, lad. If they ha' taken a liking to ye, friends may scold and say what they will; but 'tis o' no use. They'll find a way o' meeting ye sooner or later."

Max felt his hopes rise when he heard this hint. Letty, then, would contrive to see him, though how or when, Dan evidently did not mean to tell; for as soon as his unusually long speech was made, he turned his back on his visitor, and went into his cottage.

As Max climbed the cliffs, on his way back to the Abbey, he made one resolve, which, under any circumstances he intended to carry out; and that was, to extort from Letty, the next time he saw her, the fullest particulars concerning herself. If she loved him, she must and should confide in him, and let him judge for himself how far she had reason to dread Mr. Penruan.

"I am not the cleverest of fellows," he modestly admitted; "but surely my advice, or that which I could procure, ought to be of as much, if not more, service than any she receives from Dan Calynack, and the distrustful, prejudiced woman whom she calls her aunt."

Thinking thus, and dwelling on the delight of protecting and counseling his Letty, he entered the house, and was proceeding up-stairs to wash his hands and brush his hair, before luncheon, when he saw that two or three of the servants were standing, with scared faces, near the door of the room where that meal was usually served. One of them, the young girl who waited on Eleanor Haydon, sprung toward him with clasped hands and streaming eyes, exclaiming, "I am glad you have come! Oh, Mr. Haveryng, my dear young mistress!" The excited girl could say no more

Unable to gather more from Eleanor's sobbing attendant than that something dreadful had befallen her young mistress, or was now menacing her, Max dashed past her into the room to which she pointed. As he opened the door, the sound of voices, raised in altercation, reached his ear, and he might have drawn back, feeling that he had no right to intrude himself upon a family quarrel, if Mrs. Penruan had not caught a glimpse of him, and extended her arms imploringly.

As he advanced toward the easy-chair in which, for once, she sat actually upright and forgetful of self, he saw that extreme terror had deprived her of the power of articulating. Her dilated eyes were fixed on her husband and Eleanor, who were standing on either side of the table, on which the luncheon tray had been placed, and it was evident that those hysterical screams and moans she was in the habit of uttering on the most trifling occasions, were now checked by the fact that there was no one to listen to them. She was too frightened to remember her own fancied ailments, or to intrude them upon others; and when Max had taken her trembling hand in his, and given it a reassuring clasp, he moved toward the other persons in the room, to ascertain what was the cause of her perturbation.

Eleanor—her head thrown back, her nostrils quivering, her eyes positively gleaming with the fiery light of indignation—was confronting her step-father, with defiance in her face and attitude, and the Squire, his lip bitten till it bled, his hands twitching and clinching as if he longed to seize the culprit and inflict summary punishment, was thundering out accusations which she heard with scornful denials of their truth. Both were too angry to notice the entrance of Max, who, seeing that he could do no good, begged Mrs. Penruan to let him take her away; but she did not seem to hear him, although her convulsive grasp on his arm tightened as if she derived some support or comfort from his presence.

"You lie!" hissed the Squire, in answer to something Eleanor had asserted. "There is no truth in you; but don't think to blind me by your daring falsehoods! Bah! you have boasted too often of your uprightness and honesty."

"Never to you, sir, who do not know the meaning of the words!" she retorted.

"*Hon'st!* are you, to shield a thief?" snarled Mr. Penruan. 'Upright, to confirm the false tale that ran so glibly off her tongue!"

"Jessy is no thief, and I should hate myself if I could stand by and hear an innocent person wrongfully accused!" said Eleanor. "As to confirming her tale, I should like to know how I could do less when I was certain that she was speaking the simple truth?"

"It was not the truth, and you are as false as she to tell me so!" Mr. Penruan exclaimed, in tones that would have cowed a weaker spirit, but were heard by his step-daughter with no other sensation than disgust at his coarse violence.

He repeated his assertion before she deigned him a reply.

"Think the girl dishonest, and me her accomplice, if you choose!" she said contemptuously. "Your opinion will never have any weight with those that know us."

"But it shall have weight!" he furiously retorted, with an oath. "You defy me, do you? As surely as I stand here, I'll make both of you repent it! I will! I will!"

"Indeed, sir! and pray what will you do with us?" asked Eleanor, with provoking coolness. "Send for a policeman, I suppose, and give us in charge for stealing—what? Would it not be as well to have the spoons counted and our drawers examined? What a paragraph it will make for the *Cornish Mercury!* Will it be headed 'Squire Penruan's Last Freak?'"

He raised his hand and shook it at her.

"Take care—take care!" he threateningly exclaimed. "That girl shall not escape if you do. You may sneer, and taunt, and set me at defiance, Miss Eleanor Haydon; but I'll make her pay for all the insults you level at me. It's high time that you learned I am not to be offended with impunity."

"Shame upon you for the mean spirit that dictates your threats!" she answered, indignantly. "Must my offenses be visited on the head of one whose only fault is that she loves and serves me faithfully? I repeat that Jessy is innocent, and that you shall not injure her!"

"*Shall not!* Must I ask your leave as to what I do, my insolent madam? I say, and I'll maintain it, that your soft-spoken, deceitful maid was in my study this morning at daybreak, and I'll know what for. I could not sleep, and, therefore, went down-stairs in my dressing-gown and slippers to answer some letters, and this was how I detected her."

"At daybreak the girl was slumbering soundly in her own bed in the dressing-closet adjoining my room," asseverated Eleanor; "for I, too, was wakeful, and rising to get a book, saw her there."

"And made up the tale which you tell so readily," sneered the Squire. "You are very clever, Miss Haydon—remarkably clever! Your ingenuity at concocting a deliberate falsehood is something marvelous!"

"In other words, you consider me an apt pupil of your own? I shall not accept the compliment, for I have done nothing to merit it. I am dealing fairly with you, sir."

"You're not!" he roared. "You know you're not! You are heaping untruth upon untruth, to shield the girl, but 'tis of no use. I saw her too plainly."

"You did not see Jessy Embury at daybreak," said Eleanor, in her most decided manner.

"I tell you that I did! How dare you contradict me so perversely? As I went toward my study door I perceived that it was ajar, although I had myself turned the key in it on the previous night. Ay, and my second look gave me a glimpse of the female figure within."

"It was not Jessy Embury!" his step-daughter repeated.

"You have told her to say that it was not; but she knows well enough that as I rushed forward to seize and question her, it was she who fled by the window that opens on the terrace. Was I asleep, think you, or dreaming? Is there any other servant in the house so young and nimble as your artful, demure-looking, deceitful maid?"

"It was not Jessy whom you attempted to seize!" said Eleanor again, so firmly, that he stamped his foot at her in a fury.

"Hold your tongue! Do you think I shall believe your assertions, while the evidence of my own eyes flatly contradicts them? It was she; I'll swear it by—"

"Pray stop, sir! We'll dispense with your oaths!" Eleanor interposed. "They would be wasted on me, for I am as positive as ever that your eyes deceived you. But let us, for argument's sake, admit that you did see some one in your study, is it a crime to enter it? Have you lost anything in consequence of this visit of Jessy's double to your sanctum? No; I thought not."

She smiled so scornfully, that the Squire raved at her.

"*You* thought not—*you!* Why, you know that your accomplice was detected before she could effect her purpose!"

"And dare you," demanded the young lady, in tones as passionate as his own—"dare you accuse me of plotting a robbery, and sending some one to your study for the purpose of abstracting your cash-box? Because I am—unfortunately for me—your ward, must I submit to such a monstrous imputation as this?"

"Bah! You act well, very well; but it has no effect on me!" sneered her step-father. We both of us know that it was not money the girl was sent to take, but papers. She was kneeling down, examining the Indian cabinet, when I pounced upon her. Crafty wretch!" and he sawed the air with his arms in his exasperation. "She would have opened it with false keys, abstracted its contents, carried them to her employer, and that employer was you—you who are always seeking to do me a mischief."

"Then there are papers in the cabinet in your study which you are afraid that I should see!" exclaimed the undaunted Eleanor, seizing on the admission he had unwittingly made. "You hide something there, Mr. Penruan, that you dare not produce!"

He grew very pale, and for a moment gasped for breath.

"Who says so—who says so? Take care!" he repeated. "If you provoke me much more, it will be worse for you. As for the dishonest wretch in your pay, I'll turn her out of the house with my own hands!"

"She is my servant, and you shall not touch her!" answered Eleanor. "It is your turn to take care that you do not provoke me too far, Mr. Penruan. I have borne much for my mother's sake; but if you lay finger on the young girl whose innocence I most solemnly attest, I will keep your secrets no longer!"

"Do you threaten me?" he exclaimed, foaming with passion. "You are my ward; you are in my power; I may take steps that will rob your malice of its sting!"

"I am very well aware that you will not hesitate at anything; but, nevertheless, I do not fear you!" she said, boldly. "I am no child to shrink from your anger, and be treated just as you please!"

He clenched his hands so viciously that Max began to grow uneasy for Eleanor's safety, and disengaged himself from Mrs. Penruan's clinging grasp. While he was doing so, and whispering a soothing assurance that he was going to try and take her daughter away, the Squire said something, to which his step-daughter answered with stinging sarcasm.

"You will strike me, did you say? I do not doubt that you are quite ready to do so. Shall I fetch your favorite weapon—the heavy-handled whip that you can bring down so mercilessly on the head of the helpless—"

Before she could say more, the climax that the watchful Max had been dreading occurred. Infuriated by her taunting speech, the Squire whose passion had been rapidly rising to boiling point, aimed a blow at her; but the table was between them, and she escaped it. The next moment, however, he had snatched up a glass carafe that stood on the luncheon tray and hurled it at her with such deadly vengeance, that had it struck her, she could scarcely have survived the blow.

The aim was well taken, and it was to Max that she owed her escape. He had seen a look in the lurid eyes of the Squire that warned him to hurry to her side. Flinging his arms about her, he snatched her away just as the heavy carafe whizzed past them, laying bare his own temple ere it was dashed in fragments against the wall.

A shriek from the hall, where most of the servants had gathered, followed the sound of the breaking glass, and Mrs. Penruan slid helplessly from her chair to the floor.

"Your mother is fainting," said Max, holding his handkerchief to his forehead, and directing Eleanor's attention to the prostrate figure. "For her sake, end this sad scene. What is the use of arguing with, or provoking a madman?"

"Would you have me endure his injustice without protesting against it?" she passionately demanded. "Must I hear myself accused of urging an innocent girl to play the thief and spy, and not deny such foul charges? Was there aught in my words to sting him to such fury, if his own guilty conscience had not barbed them?"

"Your mother—see! she is really ill!" urged Max, instead of replying.

Eleanor made a step toward the insensible lady, but drew back again on seeing that the Squire had already perceived her condition, and was hurrying to her assistance.

"Mr. Penruan has gone to her, and I am not wanted," she said, bitterly. "He will repent his violence, now he finds that it has had such an effect upon her; and I dare say I shall have the gratification of hearing mamma declare that the fault was all mine—dear John has assured her of it—and she cannot doubt but that I have been greatly to blame! Do you think so, too?"

"I think that you ought to be cautious how you brave a man who does not hesitate to fling water-bottles at a defenseless woman," answered Max, with a contemptuous glance at his kinsman, who was now assisting the scared servants to convey his wife to her chamber. "And I do not wonder at your espousing the cause of your attendant, if you feel convinced of her innocence."

"I do!" said Eleanor, emphatically. "That there was some one in the study I suppose we must believe. One of the housemaids, probably, who had risen early to do her work before the heat of the day; though how Mr. Penruan could mistake either of these middle-aged women for my nimble, slim, fair-haired maid. I cannot comprehend."

Max did not reply. He was grasping the back of a chair, and looking so unusually pale, that now, in spite of her own preoccupation, Eleanor noticed it.

"Has our *fracas* quite upset you, Mr. Haveryng? Alas! it is not the first, and I fear it will not be the last. Good heavens! You look quite ill! Did that unlucky carafe hit you?"

By a great effort, Max managed to drop himself into the chair, and Eleanor perceived that his temple was bleeding frightfully. He had not himself been aware how much he was hurt till a feeling of weakness and exhaustion began to creep over him. The terrified girl tried to stanch the stream with her own handkerchief, crying aloud, as she found her efforts ineffectual, for some one to fetch Morison—Morison would know what to do.

Max endeavored to reassure her by declaring, with a smile, that it was nothing; he merely wanted a little water or wine to arouse him. But even as he spoke the blanched face of Eleanor grew indistinct; and by the time the person she called Morison arrived, he was only just conscious enough to know that two of the men were leading him to his own chamber, and that everything they said to him sounded as if it were uttered afar off, and must be repeated again and again before he could command his voice sufficiently to reply.

The grave, elderly woman who came at Eleanor's summons proved sufficiently skillful in surgery to stanch and bind the wound. Max recovered himself when this was done, and swallowed the simple restorative she prescribed; but when, after advising him to lie still for a few hours, and placing his pillows comfortably, she was about to follow the other servants from the room, he caught hold of her dress and prevented her.

"I know you!" he said. "You are the woman I followed to Trevor Wood—the Aunt Esther of Letty Rayne!"

Mrs. Morison glanced anxiously around; but the servants who had been assisting her had retired, and they were alone. Gaining courage when she found that no one was there to hear her admissions, she quietly acknowledged that he was right.

"But you are an inmate of the Abbey! I heard some one call you Mrs. Morison, and that is the name of the faithful old servant Miss Haydon promised that I should see."

"Miss Haydon promised this, and to you?" the woman echoed, suspiciously. "May I know why?"

"That I might satisfy myself whether she was identical with the muffled female who roams the Abbey at midnight, and dogs the footsteps of Mr. Penruan when he walks in his sleep."

"Have you told the Squire what you saw, Mr. Haveryng?" she asked, with a troubled look.

"Not yet," was the significant reply. "I prefer to wait until I have heard, from your own lips, your reasons for such extraordinary conduct."

"Have you any right to demand them, sir?" she inquired, after a pause.

"Perhaps not. You do well in reminding me of this; but my duty, as Mr. Penruan's guest and relative, is plain enough. I ought to tell him of his fit of somnambulism, and how, instead of cautiously guiding him back to his own apartments, his wife's faithful and attached servant was endeavoring to influence the sleeper in a most unaccountable manner."

"Can you, then, swear that I am the person you saw, Mr. Haveryng? If you are not very positive of this, would it not be wiser and kinder to continue silent? Mr. Penruan's suspicions once aroused, I should be driven from his house, whether I were guilty of any wrong-doing or not; and mark me, Mr. Haveryng—if I lose my situation here, I shall not be the only sufferer."

There was a degree of antagonism on the part of both, which made them eye each other keenly and distrustfully. Max disliked the woman, because he knew that she was doing her utmost to separate him from Letty; and Mrs. Morison had her own reasons for heartily wishing that the young man had never left California, or, at least, that he had kept away from this neighborhood.

"I have no wish to do you any injury," said Max, after musing a while; "but, on the other hand, I will not be a party to any trickery. If you are not ashamed of what you have done, tell me your reasons for it."

"Why should I make you a judge of my conduct, sir?" she demanded, boldly, yet respectfully.

"I have not asked you to do that; only to satisfy me that I am not acting dishonorably by my relative in keeping certain facts from his knowledge."

The woman knit her brows.

"You would have me tell you my secrets, that you may make your market of them—that you may carry them to Mr. Penruan, and play them into his hand. No, sir; I cannot bring myself to do that."

The angry Max raised himself on his elbow.

"I'll question you no more. You are, and always have been, cruelly unjust to me; but thank Heaven, you can no longer induce Letty to be the same! She at all events, trusts and believes in me."

"More's the pity," muttered Esther Morrison, "that she should be so confiding as to trust a Penruan. I'll tell you one thing, young gentleman: you've wrought me too much trouble for me to think well of you. Letty was loving and docile, and ready to be guided by my counsels, till you came in her way; and now—but 'tis useless my standing here chattering. You may have it in your power to drive me away from the Abbey; but wherever I go, Letty goes too. I do not leave her where she may be at the mercy of Squire Penruan; or any one like him!"

"Are you justified in speaking of your employer in this tone?" Max demanded.

"He is no master of mine!" retorted Mrs. Morison, angrily. "I was maid to Mrs. Haydon, and nurse to her two pretty children in their infancy; and if I fill a post of trust in this house, 'tis not to please the Squire, but myself."

"*Two* children! I thought Eleanor had neither brother nor sister?" was the young man's comment upon her words.

"Mrs. Haydon had two children when she married for the second time. Miss Eleanor is the one; you can ask the Squire, if you like, what has become of the other. He is now coming up the stairs, to make his excuses, I suppose, for hurting you; and you'll bear in mind, sir, that whatever harm you work me, falls on the innocent head of my poor Letty."

Before he could say another word, she had dropped a curtsey and gone, passing Mr. Penruan on the threshold of the door as she went.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DREAMING OR WAKING?

VERY suavely the Squire made his apologies for what had occurred, shifting all the blame from his own shoulders to those of Eleanor, who, he assured Max, had aggravated him intolerably by her obstinate and impertinent championship of her wily *soubrette*.

"She is a charming girl, is this pretty step-daughter of mine!" he added; "but too high-spirited—too quick at retort. You will have to tame her, my dear boy, when you get her to California; which is to be her destination, I suppose, as the captain has quitted the field—eh? You will have to tame her!"

"I shall not attempt to effect it by throwing carafes at her head!" said Max, whose own was throbbing violently.

Mr. Penruan chose to receive this speech as a jest.

"Ha, ha!—I suppose not; but then you will not be so weakly indulgent as I have always been? A girl who knows she is handsome is generally difficult to manage, and so I have found Eleanor. She has been a most unruly ward. She really has!"

And he sighed, as if pitying himself for what he had gone through.

"So I should think, Mr. Penruan, if what I saw and heard to-day are specimens of your method," Max retorted. "No girl of spirit would submit to be spoken to as I heard you speak to Eleanor Haydon."

"Not till after she had tried my temper dreadfully!" he asserted. "My dear Max, it's very right of you to side with her; I commend you for it. May you always be as tolerant of our pretty Eleanor's faults! But do me the justice to remember that you only came in at the end of the affair, and, therefore, know but little of the provocations I had to endure."

"I think we had better not talk about it, sir," said Max, punching his pillows viciously. "However tardily I may have entered the room, I came in time to save you from committing a murder."

"Pooh, pooh!—nonsense! You are exaggerating frightfully!" the Squire exclaimed, his face turning indescribable hues. "Of course I never meant to hurt Eleanor—merely to silence her."

"Forever?" asked his auditor.

"Ha, ha! now you are joking again; and I'll not grumble at you for it, as it proves that you are not as much hurt as I feared. Very foolish of you, really, to run forward just at that moment! You ought to have known that I did not intend to do my step-daughter any injury. You *ought* to have known that, and refrained from interfering!"

Max felt so enraged at this duplicity, that he could scarcely restrain himself from jumping up and pouring out a torrent of scornful invectives; but fortunately he remembered his promise to Charlie Renton, and contrived to keep silence.

"I suppose," said Mr. Penruan, finding that he did not speak—"I suppose I can account for Miss Eleanor's readiness to brave my authority. She expects to cast it off altogether in a short time—isn't it so?"

"Don't run away with the idea that *I* am an accepted suitor, Mr. Penruan. I could not be guilty of such contemptible conduct as paying my addresses to a young lady who has a lover already."

"Then the captain is not rejected—eh?"

"Put your queries to Miss Haydon, sir! She has not given *me* permission to enlighten you."

The Squire laughed aggravatingly.

"Am I teasing you with my questions? Is it a sore subject? I'm afraid the young lady has been playing fast and loose with you, my dear boy; and now that she threatens to jilt you, why, you don't like it! Well, well, women are contrary creatures; first smiling on the new love, then on the old, and so on to the end of the chapter!"

"I wish to heavens, sir, you'd go away!" exclaimed Max, out of all patience. "If you break my head one hour, you need not drive me wild the next!"

"Feel feverish—eh? Ah! it's been a foolish affair throughout! You really ought not to have pushed yourself forward as you did. However, it will be a lesson to you never to interfere again in my family quarrels. I don't say this angrily, my good fellow. You are a relative and a guest, and so I am quite willing to look over what has displeased me in your conduct; but at the same time, remember, it must not happen again! And now, instead of talking so much, I should advise you to lie still; that is, if you fancy yourself bad enough to go to bed. I should not have thought that a sturdy young fellow like you, used to roughing it, would have made any fuss over a scratch on the forehead, and the loss of a little blood!"

"Confound his hypocritical, artful old head!" exclaimed Max, when the Squire had left the room; leaping off the bed, and striding to and fro in his anger. "Who could endure his speeches with patience? I shall be obliged to quarrel with him, if he talks to me in this style again! So I am a meddler in family brawls, am I?—and my thanks for saving him from committing a deed that might have brought him to prison are warnings not to be so interfering again! If it were not for Eleanor, I'd take him at his word, and say farewell to this detestable place within the hour!"

But if Max had actually resolved to bid adieu to Penruan Abbey, he would not have found it an easy matter to carry out his intention. The conversation he had held with Mrs. Morison had greatly excited him, and the Squire's speeches had not tended to soothe away his feverish symptoms. He cheerfully assured the servants sent by Eleanor and her mother with kindly inquiries, that he was doing well, and should be all right by the morrow; but he did not feel able to rise and dress when the bell rung for dinner; and the night was spent in that half-delirious state, commonly called being light-headed.

Max's head, however, felt uncommonly heavy, and his eyeballs were weighed down by a stupor too full of painful sensations and strange visions to be called slumber. At one moment, he was clinging to the cliffs, waiting in dire agony of mind for that relaxing of his grasp that must hurl him he knew not where; then he was following Letty through 'Trevor Wood, with its path so tangled by thorns and brambles that he could not overtake her. But ever and anon his restlessness and incoherent mutterings were soothed by the pressure of cool hands on his brow—hands that bathed his hot face with some deliciously-perfumed water, and fanned him till, refreshed by the gentle current of air, he sunk into calm repose.

The sun was high in the heavens when he awoke, invigorated by sleep, and though still dizzy and weak, feeling more like himself than on the previous evening. Mrs. Morison came, as soon as she learned that he was moving, and played the surgeon once more, with such skill and gentleness that Max gave her grateful thanks for her services.

But she was coldly silent, and would not be propitiated by his courteous speeches. A chilling "Yes" or "No" was all he could extract from her, nor would she accept the gold coin he tried to force into her palm.

"I cannot take your money, sir. I told you so once before when you offered me some."

"True; because then you chose to regard the gift as a bribe, and I could not blame you for refusing it. But now I am simply repaying you for your very kind attentions both now and through the night."

Mrs. Morison looked at him strangely, and repeated his words.

"Through the night! What do you mean, sir?"

"Was it not you who bathed my head and face so kindly when I felt hot and uncomfortable?"

"No, sir, it was not I, nor any one else. You've been delirious, and don't know what you are talking about. One of the men-servants should have stayed with you if there had been any occasion for it; but there wasn't."

Max said no more, but when the woman had gone away he drew his handkerchief from beneath his pillow. It was redolent of the perfume he had inhaled in the night; and as he never used scent himself in any shape except a cake of brown Windsor soap for his shaving-box, he was very certain that Esther Morison was wrong, while he was right.

But who was his kindly visitor? Letty? Nay, her stern aunt would not let her approach him, even if she were in the Abbey. Could it, then, be Eleanor?

He put the question to that young lady when he descended to the morning-room, where he found her, pale and spiritless, trifling with some needlework.

"No, Mr. Haveryng, it was not I," she answered; "although I am so grateful for your prompt interference in my behalf, that I should have been pleased to do anything for you. It must have been Morison."

"Nay, she denies it, and tells me that I am self-deceived. I must confess that I have very indistinct recollections of what occurred during the night."

"Then I daresay Morison is right, for she is so testy and consequential that after she has taken the case into her hands, no one in the house would attempt to interfere with her. In spite of her sharp ways, she is kind-hearted enough to have watched over you willingly, and yet refused to confess it in order to avoid your acknowledgments."

"She is a strange woman," said Max, thoughtfully.

"Not strange," Eleanor corrected; "only quick-tempered and touchy, as old and valued servants will often be."

"Do you place great reliance in her?"

"Very great," was the emphatic reply. "We have every reason for doing so. It would grieve mamma dreadfully to part with her."

"And Mr. Penruan—is he equally attached to Mrs. Morison?"

Eleanor smiled at the question.

"Is he attached to any living creature but himself? Still, I must tell you that he would on no account part with her, although he cannot help guessing, from her short answers and sullen looks, that she dislikes him. But Morison is useful to him—very useful. As long as this is the case, he will not discharge her."

"She tells me that she holds a confidential situation here," said Max, who could not help recollecting, with some surprise, that he never encountered Mrs. Morison in those parts of the Abbey occupied by the Penruan family, and it was, therefore, with some curiosity that he awaited her reply.

But Eleanor only said briefly, "You are right; she does;" and busied herself with a knot in her cotton. There were times when she seemed afraid to speak with her customary frankness; and as this was one of them, Max sat silently watching her draw her needle in and out, until the confusion of his own mind induced another query.

"Are you aware that Mrs. Morison is the aunt of a young widow, whose name I once mentioned to you, thinking you might be able to give me some information respecting her?"

At first, Eleanor looked puzzled; but soon her brow cleared.

"Ah, I remember now! You mean the young person who had wedded Tom Rayne, the graceless nephew of the fisherman, Dan Calynack. And so she is Morison's niece? Perhaps you think it odd that I did not know this; but Morison is chary of talking about her own affairs. I fancy I have heard some one say that she has a sister residing near St. Erne, and it is quite possible that Mrs. Rayne is one of this woman's daughters."

Eleanor had said this in a careless tone, for the subject possessed for her none of that interest which made Max listen so attentively. While she talked, and at his earnest request tried to recall the surname of Morison's sister, she was watching the path by which the village postman came to the house, and secretly hoping that he would bring her a letter from Captain Renton. However, Max had eagerly seized upon one ray of light her words conveyed. Mrs. Morison's sister, the mother of Letty, resided somewhere near. If he could but learn where, what was to hinder him from seeing her, and pleading his cause to a more lenient auditor than the stern, distrustful Aunt Esther, who arrogated the right to dictate both to him and the young creature he loved.

But how he was to obtain the desired information was a very difficult question. Mrs. Morison herself would not enlighten him; the old fisherman was certain to be equally reticent; and Max could not bring himself to question the servants, who might impute to him motives that would bring discredit upon Letty herself.

He mused so long over the obstacles that always interposed to prevent his intercourse with the fair girl whom, in spite of all, he was resolved to wed, that at last Eleanor touched his arm.

"Are you asleep, cousin, or are you brooding over your injuries? I think you must forgive Mr. Penruan his share in them, as he certainly did not intend to hurt you."

"No; and according to his showing, I deserved what I got. Do not let us speak of it. I grow hot and cold every time that scene recurs to my memory! Surely, dear Eleanor, you would be safer and happier under the protection of a husband so fond and faithful as I think Charles Renton would be?"

"Of course I should," she answered, sharply. "Why do you remind me of this? To tempt me into taking the step my duty to Charlie himself bids me avoid?"

"You think he is afraid of poverty?"

"No; I am sure he is not, because he really does not know the meaning of the word. He has always had sufficient for his wants, and if he has had to practice self-denial sometimes, it has been but seldom, very seldom."

"He would not find it a hard task to practice it for you very often."

"How you talk," cried Eleanor, with sorrowful impatience. "You, who cannot conceive the easy luxurious life he has always led, and how utterly impossible it would be for us to live on his pay! Say no more, Max; my heart has whispered all your arguments but too frequently. I tell you I shall not marry without my dowry; and yet more, that there are grave reasons why I should not quit Penruan Abbey as long as my mother resides in it."

Max shrugged his shoulders. He was tired of being mystified, and he said so. "I wonder—it's a very babyish trick, isn't it?—but still I do wonder whether I shall ever come to the root of all the mysteries which have gathered about me since I have been here! Perhaps you will say that I ought not to wish it; that I must be very inquisitive to seek to know what cannot concern me. If you do, I must plead guilty; but I will say, in my own defense, that I have been more perplexed and bewildered than you can imagine."

Eleanor looked rather astonished at the impetuosity with which he was speaking, and her eyes sunk thoughtfully when he paused.

"For my share in your perplexities I am sorry," she said; "but if I have not spoken more freely on some subjects, it is because they are too painful to be dwelt upon. I am also bound by a sort of promise to my mother not to be the first to speak of family troubles to any one; a promise, however," she added, speaking more to herself than to Max, "which was only extracted for Mr. Penruan's sake; and therefore I shall not hesitate to break it if he does not keep faith with me."

Recollecting herself as she encountered the inquiring look her companion was bestowing upon her, she averted her own eyes, and stepped out on the terrace to meet the old postman. When she came back with the bag, it was to extract from it sundry business missives for the Squire; one directed to herself, which, with a rosy blush, she slipped into her pocket; and one which she held out to her companion.

"Here, monsieur," she said, with a saucy smile, "for the first time since you have been at Penruan, I give you a veritable *billet doux*, if delicately tinted paper, and the prettiest chirography in the world are to be trusted."

Max began a laughing protest that the so-called love-letter must be a tailor's bill, but stopped and stammered as he read the address. The writing was Letty's; and when Eleanor turned from him to read her own welcome epistle in the privacy of her chamber, Max tore open the envelope of his.

There was very little to reward his pains, only the words, "The fairy grot this evening," and the figure seven. But he was content.

Whether by chance or on purpose he knew not, the hour his mistress named was the one at which Mr. Penruan dined. However, he would easily make indisposition a plea for absenting himself from table, and thus keep his appointment without arousing any curiosity on the part of the Squire.

How slowly the time lagged that day! But at last the long-looked-for evening came, and leaving his excuses with one of the servants, Max sallied forth to keep his appointment.

Heedful to give no one a clew to his destination, the young man sauntered along the front of the house in a direction quite contrary to the spot where he hoped to be met by Letty, and ere long found himself under the decaying walls of a part of the building that was rapidly becoming a ruin. Not far from here a path crossed the gardens toward the cliffs; and Max was turning into it when the piteous whining of a dog arrested his steps.

Although impatient to reach the grot before Letty, he was too humane not to pause and listen to the sounds. It was surely the poor old hound Rufus—the object of Eleanor's affection and Mr. Penruan's dislike—that was yelping so pitifully for assistance. Max called to him, but was only answered by a moan. He clambered through an aperture in the wall, and found himself in a small square court, half filled with rubbish and stones.

Rufus was not to be seen, but his yelping came from the direction of a door at the opposite corner of the court; and, concluding that the poor brute had met with an accident while prowling about this part of the Abbey, he made his way thither. As soon as he opened the door, the dog bounded out, evidently rejoicing to be set free; and after licking the hands of his deliverer gratefully, he disappeared, leaving Max half-laughing, half-vexed, that he should have suffered himself to be detained for no other reason than the hound's dislike to being shut in a narrow passage.

But as he was carelessly turning away, it struck him as odd, after all, that Rufus should have been here; and peering down the passage from which he had liberated the dog, he perceived a faint glimmer of light at the further end, and felt curious to know from whence it proceeded.

Stepping forward to reconnoiter the spot more closely, he saw that the subdued light shone through a sash-door, and it flashed across him directly that it must proceed from the curiously-fitted chamber to which he had once made his way; and he could not resist availing himself of the opportunity for taking a peep once more at an apartment that had caused him much speculation as to the uses to which it was put; and drawing nearer still, he boldly looked through the sash, but only to recoil with a start and a suppressed exclamation, and vail the eyes that had beheld a sight within that room that chilled him with horror.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. PENRUAN'S SECRET.

It was some time before the young man could muster sufficient courage to approach that sash-door again, and satisfy himself that his first glance had not been a mistaken one. Brave as he was by nature, his blood was chilled now, and he could not overcome the sensations of awe and horror that assailed him. He stood in absolute darkness, for the day was rapidly closing in; and the few gleams of light that had penetrated the passage when he entered it could not reach to where he stood. All around him, therefore, the deep gloom and silence was so profound, that he could hear the loud throbbing of his own perturbed heart. With the disappearance of the dog Rufus, every connection betwixt himself and the outer world seemed to have vanished. What lay on the other side of the door at which he was gazing—whether it were living thing or statue—he could not tell. It was a mystery that chilled him by its ghastly nature.

Already he saw that this portal gave access to that strangely fitted-up room to which he had obtained admittance by means of the sliding panel in his chamber. Again he beheld the gayly-painted walls, where fruits and flowers were mingled. Again he could perceive the small shelf on which lay the tresses of flaxen hair, and that heavy-handled whip to which Eleanor must surely have been referring on the previous morning, when her taunting question had roused Mr. Penruan to fury. From his post of observation, he could also see distinctly the pile of silken cushions in the center of the room. It was over these that the lamp hung, whose tempered light enabled him to obtain so full a view of the apartment. It was in much the same state as when he first beheld it—the pile of toys in one corner, the heap of gay ribbons in the other. Only in one point was there a difference. *The pile of silken cushions was no longer unoccupied.*

Upon them reclined a female figure. Over her lower limbs a velvet *couvre-pied* was thrown, so as to entirely conceal them. A loose, ungraceful robe was drawn up to her throat, but from the sleeves gleamed forth a pair of exquisitely white and well-rounded arms; and as she lay on her side, her chin was supported on the palms of her shapely hands. Her face was turned toward the sash-door, through which Max was looking, with a sickening incapability to withdraw himself from the sight; for, oh, heavens! what a hideous face it was that he beheld!

It was rigid, colorless as the features of the dead, with the stare of vacancy in the eyes that glittered so wildly. Masses of fair hair fell like a vail round it, but these abundant tresses were disheveled, and matted, and lusterless; and on the slightly parted lips there was a mocking smile, as if the lady divined the emotions with which she had inspired Max, and felt no womanly regret that she was loathsome in his sight.

Who was this strangely secluded creature? The sister of Eleanor—the victim of one of Mr. Penruan's fits of passion? As the question presented itself, he fancied that she moved, as if about to rise and approach him; but Max had not fortitude enough to sustain such an interview. Shrinking back, he groped his way down the passage, and into the open air, looking over his shoulder more than once as he went, lest the owner of that white, rigid visage should be following, to spring upon him unawares.

It was not until he had reached the fountain in Eleanor's garden, and dashed the cool water on his head and face, that he regained his ordinary composure, and could withdraw his thoughts from what he had just beheld; and even then, as he hurried toward the fairy cave, he stopped suddenly, to battle with a hideous fancy that had crept upon him. He could not but remember that the room that he had stumbled upon communicated with his own. Could it be its ghostly occupant who had looked in upon him from the sliding panel on that first night of his arrival at the Abbey? And might she not do so again? The bare idea of awaking in the stillness of night, and finding that visage gazing down upon him, was too unpleasant to entertain, and Max resolved that nothing should tempt him to occupy any longer a chamber in which he must risk an intrusion so startling and so horrible.

And now he had reached the cliffs, and found the entrance of the cave to which Eleanor generally retreated when the peevish complaints of her mother, or the ill-humors of Mr. Penruan, became intolerable. Had Letty preceded him? No; as his eyes became accustomed to the semi-obscurity of the grot, he saw that the rock-hewn seat was empty.

"Would she fail to keep her appointment?" he now began to ask himself anxiously, when the glimmer of something white lying at his feet made him stoop to ascertain what it could be.

It was a scarf—a little scarf of lace and muslin, such as Letty had tied round her throat the last time he saw her, and he uttered an exclamation of the bitterest disappointment. She had been punctual to the moment, and not finding him there to receive her, had departed—perhaps displeased at his apparent neglect.

Feeling that his good nature had for once cost him very dear, Max was putting the scarf in his bosom, when a little hand fell on his shoulder, and the next minute Letty was in his arms.

"This is indeed a great joy!" he exclaimed, fervently. "I feared that you had gone away sorrowful, if not angry."

"Then you acknowledge that you owe me an apology?" she murmured. "It was scarcely kind to keep me waiting so long!"

"I believe, after all," said Max, "that I am not three minutes behind my time, dear love. Hark! The clock of the little church at St. Erne is even now striking the hour at which you promised to be here!"

"And so, faltered Letty, trying to release herself from his embrace, "I daresay you will think me over-bold for being the first to come here, and for growing impatient at your tarrying?"

"I could not associate the idea of boldness with you, my pure, fair lily!" was the enthusiastic response; "and it has a very pleasant sound in my ears when Letty confesses that she was impatient for my coming."

She began to dispute this. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Haverynge: I merely meant to say that it was lonely here, and—and—that when one has defied one's best friends by stealing secretly from their guardianship to meet a—a—"

"Lover," Max suggested, rather slyly.

"I—a comparative stranger," Letty went on, "every instant of time is pregnant with doubts of the wisdom, as well as the propriety, of the step."

"I'll not deny that meeting in secret, whether it be in a wood or a cavern, is repugnant to my own notions of what is right," began Max; and Letty withdrew herself from him with a hasty gesture.

"Then you are ashamed of me! You think I have overstepped the bounds of propriety. I feared as much! Why—why did I come here?"

"Stay, love, stay!" he exclaimed, as he got possession of the hands she was wringing so piteously, and with gentle force compelled her to lay her tear-stained face on his shoulder. "Not a shadow of blame do I cast upon you! On the contrary, I should have deemed you unkind if you had not sought an opportunity of seeing me. Am I not your promised husband?"

"No, no!" she faintly answered. "I must not, I dare not, say that!"

"But I say, yes, yes! We love each other; I am both willing and able to protect my darling; and I have a modest home ready for her in a fairer country than this, to which I will bear her as soon as she consents to be mine."

Letty sighed, and murmured that it could never be; yet she nestled closer to him, as if the prospects he held out were very delightful ones.

"I thank you fondly, gratefully, my lily," he proceeded to say, "for the proofs of your confidence you give me in coming here; but I also protest against the injustice of Mrs. Morison, who, for no other reason that I can divine than an unfounded prejudice, so unkindly strives to keep us apart."

"Aunt Esther thinks that she is right, and sometimes I am forced to agree with her," said Letty, sadly.

"But why? She would prevent our intimacy; but is it because she thinks that I am not worthy to be your suitor?"

"No, no—you must not fancy that!" was the earnest reply. "She has acknowledged that if you were not a Penruan, she should like you very much."

"Then she objects to your marrying at all? But this is absurd! So young, so beautiful as you are, does she believe that she can keep you secluded always?"

"Certainly not; and yet the clouds seem to thicken around my fortunes instead of dispersing, and I sometimes ask myself if it would not have been kinder if Aunt Esther had let me perish in my infancy, than to save me for a life so full of sorrow, and doubt, and perplexity, as mine seems fated to be!"

Max drew her tenderly toward him.

"Letty, there is no fate menacing you that you need fear while I am near you! Only give me the right to be your protector, and who shall dare to harm my darling?"

"And would you take me away from England—right away to some far country, where I never need hear the name of my own land again? Oh, Mr. Haveryng, what bliss it would be if I could fly my anxieties in this way?"

"Agree, then, to my wishes," he cried, ardently. "I have no ties to bind me here. I shall leave Cornwall without regret, except on account of Eleanor. Yes, I shall be sorry to say good-by to Eleanor Haydon, especially just now that she needs all the friends she can gather about her."

"Why do you say this?" Letty interposed, with a jealous pang audible in her accents. "She has a lover of her own, and cannot need your aid or sympathy."

"On the contrary, both she and Captain Renton have more reason to be sad and sorry than you or I: and, therefore, I sympathize with both. They are too poor to marry, without Mr. Penruan pays down the young lady's dower, and there is much reason to fear that he will positively refuse to do this. But who knows, dear Letty? Fortune may so smile upon us when we are united, that we may be able to devise some way of assisting our friends."

"Oh, Mr. Penruan is base, cruel!" exclaimed Letty, so absorbed in the information respecting Eleanor which he had just given her, that she scarcely heard the latter part of his speech. "Is it not enough to have blighted the very existence of one of Mr. Haydon's unfortunate daughters, that he thus interferes to prevent the happiness of the other? How will it end? Are there no limits to the terrible greed and selfishness that this man testifies?"

"Why should Mr. Penruan's faults move you so strongly, dear Letty? This is not the first time that you have spoken as if you have grave reasons for disliking, and even fearing him. Tell me, then, why? Surely, my devoted love gives me a claim to your confidence!"

Letty hesitated a moment, and then said: "Mr. Penruan has wronged me of some money that was my father's, under circumstances so atrocious in their wickedness that Aunt Esther has sworn to see me righted. But she and I are only two weak women, with so small a chance of being able to carry out this determination, that we are in constant dread lest he should discover our intentions, swoop down upon us, and put it out of our power to expose his villainy!"

"Put your case into the hands of some intelligent lawyer, dear Letty. This is not the sort of affair that women ought to dream of managing themselves."

"Ay; and the money to requite his services, and the proofs that he would demand—where are they? Alas! we have neither, and our only remedy at present is patience!"

"But the patience that is born of so much waiting is akin to despair. Is this money very precious in your eyes, that you are so anxious to recover it?"

"Not for my own sake—oh, no!" she answered. "It has been defiled—it has been fingered by evil hands, and put to the bad purposes of usury and extortion. As far as I am concerned, I would rather live in old Dan's cottage all my days, and share his frugal means, than be enriched at the cost of such trouble to some and disgrace to others as would be involved in its restoration."

"Then let it go, my own Letty," he urged, lovingly. "I ask nothing but this dear hand. You would not be fairer in my eyes if you were as richly dowered as a princess; and in the land I call my home, our wants, beyond what our garden and our fields can yield us, will be few; but were they many, I should be proud to labor for my own sweet English wife."

Letty was quite overcome by his disinterestedness and the fervor of his wooing. Her head sunk on his breast, and for the first time she let him perceive how thoroughly his affection was reciprocated.

"Ah, Max, dear Max, I knew—I felt sure that you loved me for myself; and if I could forget how much I owe to the generous friends who have watched over me through many sorrowful years, I would say, 'Take me, then, to this home of yours, and let me try to make you as happy as I know that you will make me.' But Aunt Esther has been very good. She has my interests at heart; and if she is harsh and prejudiced, forgive her. It is only because she does not know you, and is over-anxious on my account. Grant me a little more time, Max, to convince her that you are the noblest, kindest, best of men, and then—and then—"

Her voice became inaudible; but Max kissed her passionately for the half promise so bashfully given.

"I cannot refuse anything you demand; only if Mrs. Morison still proves obstinate, what then? Am I to lose my Letty because her aunt refuses to have any faith in my good intentions?"

"No, Max: I am yours, whether I come to you rich or poor, for I feel sure now that you will not care which it is. But I cannot ask Aunt Esther to relinquish her long-formed purpose until every effort to regain my rights has been tried. I shall tell her this very night, after I leave you, that I have promised to be your wife, and she must either consent to admit you into our counsels, or agree for Mr. Penruan to be left in quiet possession of his ill-gotten gains."

"We need not envy him if he is," Max observed, impulsively. "With Eleanor Haydon's upbraiding face always before him, and such mysterious inmates beneath his roof as the one I saw to-night, his life must be very wretched."

"What do you mean?" asked Letty, testifying no little excitement. "What did you see?"

"Excuse me, love; I spoke my thoughts too hastily. Not even to you ought I to publish the secrets of the man who is both my relative and my host."

"But suppose I know already every inmate of the Abbey, and can guess whom you beheld."

For a moment, Max was surprised; but then he remembered the confidential post Mrs. Morison held in the Penruan household, and the riddle was solved.

"Still, dear, I would rather not talk about what I

saw. The sight was too startling and shocking for me to feel any vulgar curiosity respecting it. I cannot doubt that it involves much that I should be pained to hear explained."

"How did you find your way into that part of the Abbey?" Letty persisted. "The door from the library is kept locked, and Aunt Esther has the key."

Max explained how the pitiful yelping of the dog Rufus had induced him to explore the ruins. "A step," he added, "which I have regretted ever since."

"Is it the first time you have ever seen Violet Haydon's retreat? That she is Mrs. Penruan's daughter her name will tell you."

Max shuddered.

"Is the unhappy creature I beheld the sister of Eleanor?"

"The twin sister," Lettie explained. "The last doctor who saw her pronounced her to be hopelessly idiotic, and since his visit it has been deemed wisest to confine her entirely to the suite of rooms she occupies."

"Her mother—her sister—do they not visit her?"

"Never. Mrs. Penruan's nerves would be too much affected by the sight—at least, so says the Squire—and therefore he has forbidden her to approach that part of the house. As for Miss Haydon, she used to return from her visits breathing such bitter denunciations against the cause of her sister's sad condition that the Squire forbade them also."

"I marvel that Eleanor, with her high spirit, permitted herself to be fettered by such restrictions," Max observed, his own honest indignation rising as he spoke.

"She did not submit to them willingly. I have heard Aunt Esther tell how she boldly defied Mr. Penruan to keep her from her afflicted sister; but he swore a furious oath that the next time her foot crossed the threshold of the chamber to which Violet Haydon had been removed, the idiot girl should be taken to an asylum in France, with the proprietor of which he was already in treaty. Eleanor held out till she saw this cold, cruel man, and then her fear of what those who were helplessly at his mercy must have to endure, made her give way."

"Poor Eleanor! this must have been her hardest trial. Letty, I cannot stay much longer at the Abbey. If I had not pledged myself to await Captain Renton's return, I would change my quarters at once. To be obliged to sit at the same table, and live on terms of apparent friendship with Squire Penruan, is painful to me. I would as soon clasp hands with a criminal! Are you sure nothing can be done for the afflicted being I saw to-night?"

"The doctors gave up her case as hopeless years ago," Letty answered. "Have you never heard how it came about?"

"I believe I have gathered the facts from Miss Haydon's angry speeches to her step-father, but—"

"But you would rather not dwell on the subject? Nevertheless, I should like to tell you what I know concerning this sad affair, without any of those exaggerations you might hear coupled with it if others told you the tale."

"Would not Eleanor herself have narrated it, if she wished me to become acquainted with this family misfortune?" asked Max, vibrating between his sense of honor, and a very natural desire to know precisely how far his kinsman was to blame in the matter.

"Miss Eleanor Haydon was not at home at the time it occurred. When her father's illness proved fatal, she and her sister were sent away till all was over; nor were they suffered to return to their mother until after she had become the wife of Mr. Penruan. Violet Haydon was the first to be restored by her friends, who had been injudiciously fostering the dislike she had taken to her step-father.

"Mr. Penruan saw that the little girl shrunk from him, and watched him with mingled fear and aversion, and he grew so morose and severe, that she still further avoided his presence as much as possible. But there was a deeper cause for this than a mere childish caprice, and so he seems to have suspected, for one day he pounced upon her in the turret-room, which was her favorite retreat, and questioned and threatened her, with no pity for her tears and terror.

"Aunt Esther has said that Violet Haydon was always a more placable child than her sister Eleanor, but difficult to subdue when once thoroughly aroused; and Mr. Penruan was so unlucky as to awaken the fiery spirit that lurked within her. But am I wearying you with this long story?"

"By no means; I am deeply, sadly, interested in it," Max answered; and she went on.

"The little girl was nursing a pet kitten when Mr. Penruan invaded her retreat, and in his ill-temper at what he termed Violet's obstinate sullenness, he caught hold of the little animal and flung it out of the window. In her frenzy of grief and indignation, the child struck at him with her hands, telling him he was a bad, deceitful man—papa had said so the night before he died, when she was lying on the bed beside him, with her arms round his neck; and papa told her that he had found Mr. Penruan out, and had made another will, which was in his old rosewood desk.

"Her incensed auditor griped her by the arm, and forbade her ever to repeat this, but Violet was in too great a passion now to be frightened by his threats. He shook her violently, and menaced her with unheard-of punishments, but the only result was to make her declare more loudly than before, 'I will—I will tell every one that you are bad, bad! that papa called you so!'

"Slipping from his hold, she rushed from the room, and he—only to silence her, as I firmly believe, and perhaps to prevent her from repeating this tale to the servants—as hastily followed. He had been out riding; the heavy whip he carried was still in his hand; he lashed the flying child with it across her shoulders, but she only fled on the faster; and then, in a moment of frenzy, madness—call it what you will—he reversed the whip, and struck her with it across the head, laying her insensible at his feet, with her fair hair dabbled with the crimson stream that issued from the wound.

"He was the first to raise her, and to try every remedy that her faithful and heartbroken nurse, Esther, could propose.

"The affair was hushed up as much as possible, and very few presumed to doubt Mr. Penruan's assertion that the child had stumbled in running, and struck her head against a projection; but, unfortunately for him, one of the servants had seen the blow struck that prostrated the child, and it was from this eye-witness that Eleanor Haydon learned the truth."

Max no longer felt any surprise at the bitterness of speech in which Miss Haydon indulged when she and her step-father disagreed. Her inheritance withheld, her youth immured in the lonely Abbey, and her only sister lingering out a life to which death would have been a positive blessing—how could she know all this, and refrain from taunting Mr. Penruan when, by some fresh display of his mean and tyrannical disposition, he aroused her indignation?

Letty broke in upon his meditations by reminding him of the length of time she had spent in the cave.

"I must not stay longer. I am here without aunt Esther's consent or sanction, and she will lecture me severely."

"Let me take you home, and if she scolds I will bear the brunt of her anger."

But Letty said nay to this proposal.

"Frankly, dear Max, I am not prepared to tell you all my secrets yet. You must let me flit away even as I came, unquestioned."

"Still bent on mystifying me!" he exclaimed, with wounded feeling. "Is this kind?"

"Stay," she said. "Before you accuse me remember that I am not wholly my own mistress. I would open my heart to you freely; and more, I will do so ere long. But I owe it to Aunt Esther to first acquaint her with my determination."

"And she will argue and expostulate, and tell you, as she did before, that being a member of the Penruan family, never mind how distant, I must be a good-for-naught: and you, Letty, will you be able to resist wavering when you listen to her?"

"Yes," was the low and decided answer; "for if I were forced now to think that you deceived me I should die. Oh, Max!" she added, clinging to him and sobbing, "I am a lonely, friendless creature, with a horrible peril hanging over me, hat even your love might not be able to avert. Promise—swear that if Mr. Penruan should come to you and whisper something fearful concerning me—me, who never harmed him—you will not believe it? Promise!"

"I do, Letty," he answered, soothing the agitation that convulsed her. "By our joint affection, I pledge myself to believe no slanderous whispers that any one may utter. By your own actions I will judge you. Fling off this shrouding mystery; trust in me to defend you from all adversaries, and I will be content."

"Let me go," she murmured, when his endearments had tranquilized her. "I am giving Aunt Esther cause to reproach me by lingering with you so long."

"But ere we part, tell me when I may hope to see you again," he urged.

Letty mused for a minute or two.

"Neither to-morrow nor the next day can I agree to meet you; but on the third evening from this I will be at the cottage of Dan Calynack, and then, Max Haveryng, ask me my history if you choose, and I will risk all, and tell it to you. But if, when you have heard it, one feeling of repulsion toward your unfortunate Letty—one fear that it would be unwise to link your future with hers—should steal into your heart, then turn from me at once, and let us meet no more."

Max would have clasped her in his arms, and assured her that nothing he could hear from her lips would induce him to do this; but she eluded his embrace, and disappeared in the darkness reigning at the further end of the cave, leaving him to grope his way back to mother earth the best way he could.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SQUIRE GROWS SUSPICIOUS.

While slowly crossing the garden, and pondering over Letty's strange speeches, Max vainly combated the uneasy feeling they had engendered. He had great faith in his betrothed's sincerity and goodness; but the cloud that enveloped her, troubled him. He could not be brought to conceive why there should be any cause for it. She had relations who loved her; and who, though in humble circumstances, were surely quite able to defend her from any acts of oppression Squire Penruan might attempt. He could only conclude that her more vigorous mind was swayed by Mrs. Morison's dread of offending her employer; an act that was to be avoided, lest it result in the loss of a post which, no doubt, was tolerably lucrative.

When once Letty had revealed to him all her difficulties, there should be an end of her terrors. He would prove himself a match for the Squire, or else carry his bride to Aquas Dolces, and there teach her to smile at every trouble she had borne with in her own less-favored land.

This resolve set Max planning and contriving how to make his hacienda most comfortable for a lady's abode. He sat all the evening, either absorbed in his calculations and endeavors to decide which room Letty would like for her own, and whether the magnificent creeping plants he had trained over the veranda would be in flower when they arrived, or imagining her delight and surprise at the beauty of the scenery surrounding his dwelling, till at last Eleanor began to rally him upon his abstraction. Her own spirits had risen since the receipt of a hurried note from Charles Renton, telling her that he had hopes of obtaining a berth in one of the government offices; for although she still adhered to her resolution not to marry without her dower, that resolution was wavering; and she was beginning to debate whether it would be very difficult to reconcile herself to poverty, and tone down the wants of a gallant captain in a crack regiment to so small an income as two hundred a year. Love, like time, will often work wonders; and Eleanor was half inclined to run the risks she had so often deprecated, and trust herself to the guidance of the little god.

Still she knew that it would cost her a struggle to come to this resolve. To leave her mother and the hapless Violet helplessly in the hands of Mr. Penruan; to become a penniless wife, instead of bringing her husband the forty thousand pounds that her father had assigned as her portion; and, more than all, to know that this sum would swell the hoards of the Squire, were all hard, bitter facts, that chafed Eleanor Haydon's high and haughty spirit almost beyond endurance.

"You have been a poor companion to-night, cousin Max," she remarked, as she bade him good-night. "I hope the thoughts in which you have been buried have been pleasanter ones than those you left me to dwell upon."

"I am very sorry for my rudeness," he answered. "How shall I atone for it? By proving more attentive to-morrow? What do you say to another sketching excursion? I should like to carry away with me some more reminiscences of the Cornish coast, and the weather promises to be favorable for the trip. Will you go?"

"If mamma has no objection." And Mrs Penruan, hearing her name mentioned, woke up from a doze, to declare that she should be glad for Eleanor to have a little practice. She drew so seldom now, and forgot how soon she might be a poor, delicate invalid like her mother, and unable to enjoy any amusement.

"If donkeys were fashionable for a lady to ride," she added, "and my figure permitted—and my health, of course—I should like to go with you. No one seems to recollect how dull it is for me to be shut up here day after day as I am, with no society but my maid, and nothing to think of but my own sufferings!"

Mr. Penruan looked up sharply, but did not speak; and Eleanor, putting her arm caressingly about her mother, exclaimed, "Then why do you submit to be shut up here, dear mamma? It is not good for you. I have often told you so. Let us go to town for a few weeks; and while you are there you can consult a clever physician, whose prescriptions will soon strengthen your nerves."

But Mrs. Penruan drew her shawl about her, and sighed and shivered.

"You take my breath away, Eleanor; you talk so fast and so wildly! How could I, in my weak state, endure the fatigue of such a long journey? By rail, too! Not but what if *you* think, John, dear, that I ought to make the effort, I will. It is just the season for visiting London, and my wardrobe wants replenishing, and—"

"Can't you stay till to-morrow before you discuss this delectable journey?" snarled the Squire. "Don't you see that Mr. Haveryng has been patiently standing for the last quarter of an hour, waiting to bid you good-night?"

"He'll not let her go," whispered Eleanor, as she followed Max from the room. "The cat never lets the mouse go beyond the reach of its clutches. Yet I am sure the change would rouse mamma wonderfully. If I could have her to myself for a few days, I might even stir her into interceding on my behalf; but Mr. Penruan knows that, when not biased by him, she is the most generous, the most affectionate of mothers, and he schemes accordingly."

"Nevertheless, hope on!" cried Max, so cheeringly, that Eleanor was beguiled into a smile, and thus they parted.

But when Max had entered his chamber, all his horror of receiving another nocturnal visit from the tenant of the ruins returned in full force. Much as he commiserated Violet Haydon, he could not overcome the repugnance her distorted visage had created, and to lie down in his bed with the dread upon him that she would steal in and be the first object he beheld in awakening, was too great to be conquered. On the morrow he would ask one of the servants to change his apartment; and for to-night he would make his bed on one of the couches in the drawing-room.

Stepping softly, to avoid disturbing any one, he went back to the saloon he had so lately quitted, and, with his rug and some cushions, prepared to make himself comfortable for the night; but either from the change of sleeping quarters, or the excitement occasioned by his interview with Letty, he was unusually wakeful, and lay listening to the ticking of a clock on a bracket just above his head till the small hours had arrived without weighing down his eyelids.

But now a measured footstep paced along the gallery above, and Max raised himself to listen. Mr. Penruan was walking in his sleep again, muttering as he came slowly down the stairs, and fumbling with the bunch of keys he held in his hands. He passed the door of the drawing-room, then returned, and, entering the room, walked toward a cabinet, and stood before it for several minutes in apparent irresolution.

The lamp he carried gleamed on his drawn features and wildly-staring eyes, rendering him such an unpleasant object to contemplate, that the young man heartily wished he had not seen him. Nor was he sorry when, saying softly to himself, "Not safe there—no, not safe there!" the Squire walked slowly away.

Max hoped that he would end his ramble by returning to his apartments, and mentally breathed an anathema when he saw, by his receding light, that Mr. Penruan was descending to the lower part of the house. Much as he disliked the idea of following the somnambulist, he was debating the propriety of doing so, when he heard a step following, and keeping pace with the Squire's; and assuring himself that under no circumstances could his own watchfulness be necessary now, he rolled himself up in his rug, buried his head in his pillows, and made another, and, this time, more successful attempt to go to sleep.

Scarcely, however, had he settled to rest, and a vivid dream commenced, in which he saw himself at Aquas Dolces with Letty, when a cry of mingled fear and suffering made him start up in alarm. The cry was repeated, accompanied by a scuffling noise, as if a violent struggle was going on at no great distance; and, as Max sprung from the couch, he heard a feminine voice exclaim: "Help! help! would you kill me?"

Guided by the lamp which Mr. Penruan had carried and placed on a table in the hall, Haveryng sped thither, his progress quickened by the sound of doors opening and voices asking one another: "What is it?" Proofs, these, that the scream he had heard had been sharp enough to penetrate to the ears of those who slept in the chambers above.

At the further end of the hall, a small door had been unlocked with one of the keys Mr. Penruan carried, and the brief glance Max had time to cast that way showed him that a narrow flight of steps within led downward to the cellars, where his host kept the very small stock of wine he dispensed so charily. Close to this door, the Squire himself was engaged in a desperate wrestle with a female figure, which he

had borne to the ground, using so much violence as to extort once more the piercing cry for aid that had disturbed the inmates of the house.

"Be merciful, Mr. Penruan!" Max exclaimed, as he caught hold of the hands that were griping the female's throat, and rescued her from the choking grasp. "It is a woman whom you are treating so roughly. Do you forget that?"

He placed her on the nearest chair, and, as she threw back the disheveled hair that had hitherto concealed her face, he saw that it was Mrs. Morison whom he had rescued.

"How dare you interfere?" cried Mr. Penruan, who was foaming with passion. "She is a mean, sneaking wretch—a spy—a contemptible, vexatious spy! If she were a man, I'd hang her like a dog—like a dog, I would!"

"Might I ask what Mrs. Morison has done to provoke such strong language?" asked a voice; and Eleanor, wrapped in her crimson dressing-gown, her white feet thrust into her slippers, looked over the balustrades at the top of the stairs.

"Nothing very dreadful, I fancy," Max took upon himself to reply, though in his heart he believed Mrs. Morison merited in some degree the accusations leveled at her. "Pray, go back to bed, Miss Haydon. I do not think you will be disturbed again."

The Squire cast a vicious glance at the hesitating Eleanor.

"Do you hear?" he snarled. "Do you think I want every one in the house glowering at me? Cannot I speak to an insolent servant without some one standing by to carp at every word I utter? As for you,"—and he turned fiercely upon the silent woman, by whose side Max thought it prudent to retain his post—"I have found you out in your prowling, deceitful ways! I have long suspected you, and now—"

"Suspected me?" Mrs. Morison interposed, with an uneasy glance. "Of what, sir? I have served my employers faithfully. Of what fault—of what crime am I accused?"

"Don't bandy words with me!" she was sharply commanded. "You were dogging my steps—prying into my actions. Is this no fault? Is this the fidelity of which you boast? Bah! I always thought you were not to be trusted; and now I know it, and I shall take my measures accordingly."

Max could see that Mrs. Morison trembled as she listened to his harsh and angry sentences; but ere she could make any reply, Eleanor, disregarding her step-father's injunctions, joined them.

"What are you disputing about?" she inquired. "What evil deeds have you been committing, Morison, at this unearthly hour?"

"Mr. Penruan must answer that question, Miss Eleanor. He has been walking in his sleep, and—"

"It's false!" roared her master, growing pale, and blustering to hide his annoyance. "I'll not have this tale set about. Do you hear? *I won't have it!* Who dares to say that I walk in my sleep?"

"I do," said Max, coolly ignoring his threats. "I have seen you pacing the gallery above in a fit of somnambulism. You forget, sir, that you have yourself just given proofs that this is no falsehood, for what else would bring you, long after midnight, to visit your wine-cellars?"

But Mr. Penruan was strangely averse to this view of the case being adopted, and though he smiled and tried to appear at his ease, it was in a very flurried manner that he made reply: "Very aptly put, and cleverly urged, my dear Max; but what a pity to waste your powers of reasoning on—nothing! The simple facts of the matter are these. I felt indisposed, and not wishing to disturb any one, came down-stairs myself to procure a glass of wine. This woman must have dogged my steps very closely, for just as I was unlocking the door, I found her at my elbow."

"If you were only going into the cellars for wine, Mr. Penruan, what signified whom you found at your elbow?" asked Eleanor; and was requited with a look so terribly vindictive, that Max took a step nearer to her, drawing Mrs. Morison with him. But the latter was evidently anxious to stifle further discussion, and, in a very submissive manner, she interposed:

"Pray, Miss Haydon, don't say any more. If I have displeased Mr. Penruan, I shall consider myself very unfortunate. Indeed, sir," she added, addressing herself to that gentleman, "I had the best of motives for—what I did. If I have offended you by it, pray forgive me."

"But you maintain that I was walking in my sleep, eh?"

"No, sir," she answered, still speaking with the humility that puzzled Max.

"And you had no other motive for following me than your fears that I was not well, or that I might meet with an accident?"

"No other reason," Morison murmured, after a momentary struggle with herself. "I have no cause to feel ashamed of anything I have done," she added, more firmly.

"Ah!" and the Squire glanced at her cunningly beneath his half-closed eyelids. "Then I have done you an injustice. Dear me! how very much I regret it! But we are all liable to make mistakes occasionally. I hope you'll overlook my rough treatment of you, my good Morison."

"Certainly, sir, as you have expressed your regret for it;" and, making a curtsey to him, Mrs. Morison was moving away, when her master's voice recalled her.

"Stay!" said Mr. Penruan. "I have not done with you yet. I have one more little remark to make before you go. I don't allow my servants to be up, Mrs. Morison, after I have myself retired for the night, and I cannot have my rules infringed by either of them, however faithful and *necessary* to me they may consider themselves. As you have chosen to do so, I dismiss you from my service. *You have been here too long*, and you will quit the Abbey to-morrow morning. If I find you on my premises after ten o'clock, I will give you into custody as a trespasser. Remember that!—clever, plausible, innocent Mrs. Morison!"

The woman curtsied, and tried to preserve her air of composure, but in vain. Murmuring, "Then all is lost! My poor Letty!" she sunk down on the floor in an agony of tears and sobs that ended in hysterics.

Max assisted in carrying her to the library, where he left her to the care of Eleanor, and went back to his couch in the drawing-room, to pass the remainder of the night in vainly conjecturing why this woman's dismissal was of such vital importance, both to herself and Letty.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NO LONGER WELCOME.

THEY were a very silent trio, Mr. Penruan, Eleanor and Max, when they met at the breakfast table on the morning which was to witness Esther Morison's departure. The Squire was grievously troubled at the discovery that his perturbed dreams placed him at the mercy of any member of his household who chose to keep watch over him; and he was unreasonably bitter against his wife for sleeping so soundly that she never missed him from her side.

Eleanor was as busily engaged in revolving some perplexity as her step-father, and was less reticent about it, for when the meal was ended, and he arose, gathering up the papers and letters he had scarcely glanced at, she made a gesture to detain him.

"I must ask you a question or two, Mr. Penruan. No, don't go away, cousin Max; your presence may serve as a reminder that it is worse than folly to lose one's temper."

"If you have anything to say to me, say it quickly and civilly," the Squire told her. "The presence of my young kinsman may *remind* you, as your phrase is, that to the husband of your mother you owe both respect and obedience, and, therefore, are not justified in attempting to dispute any of my commands."

"Well, then, sir, as it is evident that you guess on what subject I wish to speak to you, I will at once inquire whether you purpose carrying out the intentions you expressed last night? Is Esther Morison to leave the Abbey?"

Mr. Penruan raised his eyebrows.

"Most certainly! Did I not tell her so last night? Am I given to saying one thing and meaning another?"

"There are grave—very grave—reasons why Morison should remain here," Eleanor persisted. "Do you forget that, sir?"

"There *were* reasons why I put up with the presence of this woman in my house. But she has always displeased me; there has been covert insolence in her looks—"

"Oh, sir, it will not do for *you* to watch the looks of those about you too closely!" cried the impetuous Eleanor, who could rarely restrain herself from uttering a stinging retort.

"Covert insolence in her looks," he repeated; "and little less in her manner! She would have bearded me, if she dared; and I have borne with her too long! Have you any other remarks to make on my 'domestic affairs,' Miss Eleanor Haydon?"

"You spoke strangely just now," she answered. "You corrected my remark that there are reasons why we should retain Morison's services, and signified that they are no longer required. Am I right?"

Mr. Penruan nodded.

"What do you mean, sir? Is there not the same sad cause for her vigilant and affectionate attentions that there has been for years?"

And Eleanor's eyes began to question his with much anxiety in them.

"You may think s ; I do not," he coolly replied; "for I am of opinion that Mrs. Morison's patient might be in more skillful hands than hers; and, therefore, the said patient will be removed as soon as the necessary arrangements have been made."

"You will not be so cruel!" Eleanor began, but he promptly stopped her.

"You had better understand at once, young lady, that nothing your spirit of contradiction, your determined and undutiful opposition to all my plans, may l ad you to urge, will have any weight with me! I have resolved to do what *I* think best, and to do it in such a manner that not even you will have any opening for finding fault with my proceedings!"

"Explain yourself, sir!" she exclaimed.

"To whom? To you? How long have I been under the domination of my ward and step-daughter, that she must be consulted before I lift a finger in my own house? Take care, Miss Eleanor Haydon! As you have insisted that our young friend shall be a witness to your unseemly conduct, I will tell him what, in pity for you, I have hitherto concealed. You have an idiot sister, whose condition you, and one or two as evil-minded as yourself, have attributed to an act of harshness committed by me—an accusation as absurd as it is false!"

Eleanor opened her lips to utter a vehement protest, but checked herself.

"You have an idiot sister," he repeated significantly; "and your own bursts of violence—your wild freaks, especially that of riding a horse as evil-tempered as yourself—must lead any thoughtful person to the conclusion that Violet Haydon is not the only one in the family whose brain is affected. Take care lest for *my* guardianship a more stringent one should be found advisable for *you* as well as your sister!"

He quitted the room before she could make any reply; and Eleanor, pale, gasping for breath, caught at the arm of Max, and looked wistfully at him.

"No," she said, recovering herself; "his abominable insinuations have not had any effect upon you! I am sure *you* will not be so easily induced to believe that a hereditary malady exists in my veins. But others may be more credulous; and then—oh, then what will become of me? Max Haveryng, I swear to you by everything I hold sacred that what this man has just implied is as false as his own heart! No taint of madness is in our family, and he knows it!"

"My dear little cousin, why do you let Mr. Penruan's unfeeling observations agitate you in this manner?" Max remonstrated. "Rest assured that he only talks in this strain to silence and annoy you. He knows well enough that he could not interfere with your liberty. He may be an autocrat in his own dwelling, but there his power begins and ends. He would not be allowed to smuggle an heiress out of the way, without searching inquiries being made as to the real state of the young lady's intellects."

"Thanks for that reassuring speech," was the more cheerful reply. "I dare say I shall soon overcome the chill his menace sent through me, and so we will say no more about it; only if ever you do hear that the lovely and accomplished step-daughter of Mr. John Penruan has mysteriously disappeared, I hope you will remember who is the person most likely to profit by getting rid of me."

"Pray don't dwell on such a notion. You make me feel quite uncomfortable," said Max. "At what time will you be ready for the sketching excursion we promised ourselves?"

But Eleanor answered, with a sigh, "At no time to-day, good coz. I have other things to think of than my own amusement. I suppose Mr. Penruan has taken it into his wise head that I have placed unlimited confidence in you, and told you all his secrets, as well as my own; and so, as he has broached the subject, I need not longer attempt to conceal that my only sister is as much in need of my pity as my affection. But, perhaps, you have heard the story of this great family affliction from other lips?"

"Not till last night. I could not help knowing that some mystery was connected with apartments that communicate with the library; but, on my honor, I have not made any deliberate attempts to discover what it was."

"I quite believe you; and you must also believe me when I declare that—let Mr. Penruan say what he will—it was a deed of violence that made my pretty loving little Violet what she is."

"I have heard this also; but pray judge Mr. Penruan as leniently as my informant did. She assured me he was carried away by rage when he struck the poor child, and was most eager to alleviate the suffering his rash act had occasioned.

"And yet he would send away the faithful creature who has watched over her ever since the occurrence!" Eleanor reminded the speaker. "And worse—he evidently meditates handing our poor Violet over to the tender mercies of the cold, stern foreigner whom he brought here once before. But this shall not be. The helpless girl shall not be hurried away from her native land, and immured in some private asylum, where she may be treated with the greatest brutality! No, no! I say it shall not be! I will go to mamma, and try to rouse her into opposing it."

"Don't be too hasty!" cried Max, seizing her by the dress, as she was flying past him. "Just ask yourself if it will be right to say anything that may induce Mrs. Penruan to embroil herself with her husband?"

"Would it be right, think you, to keep silence, and let my own and only sister be taken away from us? Mamma has been too yielding as it is, for she has permitted herself to be estranged from the unfortunate child, for whom maternal love might have done so much. Is it not bad enough to know that although she resides beneath the same roof, we never behold her? To know that those nearest and dearest to the afflicted one are never permitted to minister to her wants, nor make the smallest efforts to alleviate the awful affliction that has fallen so heavily upon her."

But Max, remembering the ghastly being he had beheld on the previous evening, shook his head. "Nay, in this matter I must confess I think with Mr. Penruan. Such interviews would be productive of so much pain to you and your mother that he has acted wisely in forbidding them."

"Whenever was John Penruan actuated by such motives as you are ascribing to him?" was Eleanor's bitter comment on his speech. "Painful, did you say? Yes, it will be anguish that no words can express when the playfellow of my happy childhood looks at me with vacant eyes; but I must nerve myself to endure this. She shall not be left to the careless hands of indifferent persons!

Max was a little puzzled, and Eleanor hastily added: "You do not understand me; and yet I am only going to do the same as you would, were you in my position. When Morison leaves the Abbey, I shall take her place, and charge myself with the care of my sister!"

"Will Mr. Penruan object—" Max began.

"I shall not ask his permission. When he understands that I am with Violet, he will also comprehend that if she is removed from here, I intend to go with her. For very shame's sake he will not venture to rid himself of both of us at once, or else I should feel that I am playing into the hands of a gentleman who will take advantage of every false step I make!"

She slid her fingers into the palm of Max, who was in great doubt what to say to her plans.

"Dear cousin, I shall look to you to give me prompt warning, if anything happens that may affect my future. Two short, sharp taps at the door in the library will always bring me there."

"But Captain Renton? What will he say to an arrangement that will entail upon you so much anxiety, and so many unpleasantnesses?"

"He is a soldier!" she answered, proudly. "Tell him that I am doing my duty, and he will—nay, he *must*—be content. Indeed, dear cousin, I feel that this may be a fortunate circumstance for both of us. I might have been weak and selfish enough to burden poor Charlie with a penniless wife, if I had not had my home obligations brought so strongly before me."

But Eleanor's lip quivered as she tried to say this in her gayest tones, and Max still retained the hand she had given him.

"I cannot feel sure that it is your duty to seclude yourself with an unfortun te who is incapable of appreciating your devotion or benefiting by it. Pray take a few hours for consideratio.,"

"Not an hour! not a moment! If I went to mamma, a I pr posed doing at first, she would only cry, and declare that no one is so much to be pitied as herself!"

"And is she not greatly to be pitied?" asked the young man.

"Yes. Poor mamma! her case is all the more deplorable because she has not strength and will to help herself or her children. What counsel would she give me if I asked it? None. Her dread of offending Mr. Penruan would prevent her interfering in Violet's behalf; and so she would grow hysterical, and scold me for upsetting her, until I should leave her, half-angry, half-sorry, as I have often felt before. So say no more. I have an innate conviction that I shall never repent devoting myself to my poor sister."

Certainly, Max had never thought her so beautiful as when, her eyes glistening through tears, she ran away to commence her self-imposed task. With his hands thrust into his pocket, he was standing at one of the windows, wondering whether Eleanor would be as disagreeably impressed as he had been with the appearance of her unfortunate relative, when a servant came in to say that Mr. Penruan wished to speak to him, and was awaiting him in the study.

As he crossed the hall, in obedience to this summons, Mrs. Morison came down the principal staircase, in her bonnet and shawl, with a traveling-bag in her hand. She stopped short at the sight of Max, and seemed inclined to address him; but when he paused, too, and civilly accosted her, she gave him the curtest of replies, and preceded him to the study, where Mr. Penruan evidently expected her.

No acknowledgment of her long and faithful services was heard from the lips of the grim Squire. He pushed across the table the little pile of money that was due to her, showed her where to sign her name on the receipt already written, and then, giving her a nod of dismissal, turned to Max so quickly, that he did not perceive the look of contemptuous dislike the woman bestowed on him ere she quitted the room.

"If she was not his enemy before, he has made one of her now," thought the more observant Max, and then he sighed regretfully; for, to his warmer heart, there was something pitiful in the way this wealthy man, endowed with so many blessings, contrived to alienate every creature who came near him.

Mr. Penruan fidgeted awhile with some papers; then addressed his young kinsman, with some constraint:

"Am I trespassing on your time? There was some talk, w sn't there, of a trip somewhere?"

"There was; but Miss Haydon is otherwise engaged."

"Hem!" And again Mr. Penruan's hands moved restlessly among his papers. "As you have mentioned Eleanor's name, my dear Max, I may as well tell you that I am beginning to feel rather uneasy on her account—and yours!"

"Speak plainly, Mr. Penruan," said Max, in his bluntest manner. "At present I do not understand you at all."

"Indeed! But you will give me credit, I hope, for the kindest motives, in saying what I feel it my bounden duty to say?"

"If you are doing a duty, sir," was the quick reply, "I should be the last man in existence to find fault with you for it."

"Thanks. It is very pleasant to have to deal with a young man who is so thoroughly straightforward as you are—very pleasant! I have no doubt that you will see the justice of my remarks—no doubt whatever!"

As Max did not know what answer to make to this speech, he merely bowed his head, and, after a little pause, the Squire proceeded:

"You have never given me your confidence, my young kinsman. I am not going to complain of this, nor express how much such reserve toward one who was most willing, most anxious, to befriend you, has pained me; we will let that pass. As I said before, I do not wish to speak of myself."

To what was his harangue tending? Resolved not to speak till he knew, Max still remained mute; and, finding him thus impenetrable, it was in more acrid tones that Mr. Penruan went on:

"You have been domesticated here for some time, Mr. Max Haveryng, and the world, always ready to be censorious, is beginning to interest itself in your motives for remaining so long at the Abbey."

"Am I to understand, sir, that I have outstayed my welcome?" the young man demanded haughtily.

"My good Max, did I not tell you that it was not of myself I was talking? Have I not been delighted to have you here? Our subject is Eleanor Haydon. She is generally considered a charming young lady, and when a gentleman takes up his residence beneath the same roof with her—shares her walks and her rides—sings with her—seeks every opportunity of being in her society—the gossips naturally inquire what are this gentleman's intentions?"

"I am not at all inclined to satisfy the gossips," retorted Max; "but if *you*, sir, put the question to me on your own account, I reply, without hesitation, that I love Eleanor Haydon as if she were my sister."

"You will find it difficult to make others believe that your *very* marked attentions have been merely brotherly ones," said the Squire, with an unpleasant smile; and his auditor began to feel hot and angry.

"As far as I am concerned, sir, it is of no consequence what indifferent persons may think of my conduct, and it will always be in your power to exonerate me; for you know that it has been by your own pressing invitation that I have remained so long at the Abbey, and *you* are also aware that I have never entered myself in the list of Miss Haydon's suitors."

"Pray do not add to the awkwardness of my position by giving me such difficult points to answer as those you have enumerated. I cannot enrol myself as your partisan, my young friend, because it is incumbent on me as Eleanor's guardian to tell you that if you mean nothing—*absolutely nothing* by your attentions, you really ought not to remain here."

"Then you wish me to bring my visit to a close?"

"I!" and Mr. Penruan put up his hands with a helpless air. "Have I not just told you that my own wishes must be in abeyance? You know how gladly I should have received you as a son-in-law; but, if this is not to be, duty, my dear Max, duty compels me to say that Eleanor's interests demand your departure."

Max bit his lip; but he knew that the keen eyes of the Squire were upon him, and he tried hard to repress any other symptoms of annoyance. That Mr. Penruan was as eager to be rid of him as not long since he had been eager to keep him, was evident; and for his own part he would not be sorry to bid adieu to a house that had so many disagreeable associations connected with it. But he had learned to distrust his kinsman; to seek for hidden motives beneath everything he said and did; and the question that now arose was: Why am I in his way? Why is he striving to drive me hence in such unaccountable haste?

For once in his life, the impetuous Max acted with caution, and temporized.

"I could not wish to remain under your roof, Mr. Penruan, if my presence is likely to prove injurious to the fair fame of a young lady I admire as much as I do Miss Haydon; and I would quit the Abbey within the hour—"

"That will be very sudden," interposed the Squire before he could say another word; "but I honor you for your eagerness to atone for your mistakes, and so I shall not oppose it. I will myself carry your adieus to Mrs. Penruan, who is not well enough, I fear, to see you, this morning."

"I would quit the Abbey within the hour," Max repeated, "if I did not feel that to do so before Captain Renton returns would look as if I were really guilty of some breach of good faith."

"You may trust me to explain everything satisfactorily," the Squire assured him. "You may safely leave your character in my hands, my dear Max. I will take care that no one shall assail it."

"Thank you," the young man answered coldly; "but I prefer to fight my own battles. Captain Renton will be here in a day or two. When he arrives, I will remove to St. Erne; but quit the neighborhood I will not till I feel sure that both Eleanor and the man who hopes to make her his wife acquit me of any proceeding of which I have reason to be ashamed."

"You look at me, Mr. Max Haveryng, as if my plain speaking had offended you," the Squire exclaimed, with a frown. "If you wish to pick a quarrel with me for—"

But Max hastily interposed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Penruan; I can have no such intention while I am enjoying your hospitality. I will think over what you have said, and rid you of my presence here as quickly as is compatible with certain obligations I have entered into."

"Shall I be considered *too* inquisitive if I ask what you mean by certain obligations?" Mr. Penruan inquired, puckering his brows.

"I merely alluded to a promise I gave Captain Renton," said Max, who did not care to tell his curious host that the ardent lover had bound him to watch over Eleanor, till he could return and do so himself.

"Then you leave us—when?" asked the Squire, keeping to the point with a pertinacity that was very galling, and would have driven Max into answering, "This very moment!" if he had not been restrained by the thought of Eleanor. To go away without seeing her—to leave her without a friend here, and therefore quite at the mercy of her unprincipled step-father—would be as selfish as cruel; and therefore he once again made an effort, and controlled his rising temper.

"Pardon me, Mr. Penruan, if I defer replying to your question until to-morrow. Surely you are not afraid that Miss Haydon's happiness or prospects will suffer by my tarrying here for another four-and-twenty hours, are you?"

"Then to-morrow you bid farewell to Penruan; but not forever! Of course, we shall see you when you visit England again," said the Squire, wisely ignoring the query Max had just put to him. "We shall miss you very much, my dear young friend—very much, indeed!"

He was beginning to add some flattering remarks, the insincerity of which so disgusted his auditor, that he abruptly brought them to a close by saying that he would not hinder Mr. Penruan any longer, and quitting the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REAL OR UNREAL.

THE wounded pride that Max contrived to keep in abeyance while he was with his churlish host, arose in full force when he was once more alone, and able to think over his annoying speeches. No, not even for Eleanor's sake, much as he liked her, could he stay at the Abbey, after having been so plainly told to go; and with frowning brow and burning cheek, he went to the library to warn her of his intentions.

His tap at the door leading to the ruins was quickly answered by Eleanor herself. She had been weeping, and had the air of one who had just received some great shock. In fact, she did not at first seem able to comprehend what Max was telling her, so completely had other events overwhelmed her.

"I will see you again presently," she said. "To-morrow we will talk over these things. Just now my mind is so perturbed that I cannot."

"My dear little coz, you do not seem to have understood what I am saying. Unless I can be of any real assistance to you, I shall certainly quit the Abbey at once."

Eleanor put her hands to her forehead.

"Morison gone—you going—and Charlie away! You make me tremble when you remind me how friendless I am."

"Shall I telegraph for Captain Renton? Although I do not know what schemes Mr. Penruan has in hand, I feel with you that he is not to be trusted; and if I leave this house, I shall not go further than St. Erne until you have some one near to whom you can appeal for protection if you should need it."

Eleanor stood looking at him absently for some minutes before she made any reply.

"I am bewildered," she said at last, "something has—has occurred that I cannot speak of yet; but if you will give me time—" She checked herself. "Nay, I forgot that you spoke of going hence at once. Dear friend, do not leave the Abbey yet," she added, entreatingly. "Telegraph to Charlie. He ought to be here; but do not go away yourself until he arrives. In pity for two very helpless creatures, promise that you will not."

"It would be hard to refuse a request couched in such terms," said Max, hesitating; "but it is harder to stay beneath the roof of the kinsman who bids me begone in no measured terms."

"If that is your only objection, I can at a word remove it. You are my guest—mine and my poor sister's. Mr. Penruan has no right to the property he holds. He is an impostor, and he knows it."

"Are you so very sure of this, Eleanor? Remember, it is no light charge to bring against the husband of your mother."

"You must not question me just yet," she answered. "Give me your promise, and let me go. You have much to learn, but not from me."

"Letty—does it concern Letty?" he demanded, eagerly; but she only shook her head, and repeated the words, "Your promise; give me your promise."

"I will remain here till Captain Renton arrives," he began; and she stayed to hear no more, but, with a hasty nod, retreated, closing and barring the door by which she had entered the library.

Max did not absolutely repent the pledge he had given, but he found his position more and more intolerable with every passing hour. He was no longer an acceptable guest; and to his fiery spirit this was an ever-present annoyance, not to be shaken off by any of the resources at hand.

He whiled away a portion of the morning fishing, and carried to the cook a basket so well filled, that she exclaimed in delight at such an addition to her larder; and then, throwing off his coat, he worked industriously in Eleanor's garden till the first bell rung for dinner, and he knew he could no longer avoid the presence of his inhospitable kinsman.

But Max rose superior to all vexations when he found on his dressing-table a note, signed with the magic name of Letty. It contained but these words: "At Uncle Dan's this evening;" but they sufficed to render him very happy. He augured all he wished for them; for he knew that Letty would not have summoned him to the promised interview at an earlier date than she had previously named, if it were not with the fixed purpose of fulfilling the assurances she had given him at their last meeting. His probation was ended; the concealment and reticence that had plagued him would be satisfactorily accounted for; and if no cloud interposed betwixt him and the felicity of which he dreamed, a few days more would see him speeding back to America with his bride.

He went down to dinner in so cheerful a mood, that the Squire surveyed him askance more than once. Mrs. Penruan was unusually lachrymose; and a chance allusion to the absent Eleanor made her sigh and apply her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I am a most unfortunate mother; and yet it is not my fault that things are as they are, though Eleanor talked to me this morning—"

"Like a fool!" snarlingly interposed her husband. "I wish you would eat your dinner, and hold your tongue!"

"How can I eat, Mr. Penruan, when my heart—"

"*Will* you help Mr. Haveryng to that dish beside you?" he demanded, in tones that made her tremble as she obeyed him. "Has Max told you that he leaves us to-morrow morning?"

"I am so sorry to hear it!" Mrs. Penruan exclaimed. "It has been quite nice to have some one in the house that I could talk to without being afraid of saying something or other—"

But the poor lady was fated not to finish her speeches, Mr. Penruan rudely breaking in with the observation that "Women never did talk without making some remark that would have been better unsaid."

After this, no one attempted to speak again; and when the cloth was removed, and Mrs. Penruan left the gentlemen to their wine, Max, with the briefest of apologies, quitted the table also, and took his way down the cliffs to the cottage of the fisherman, Calynack.

Dan himself admitted him. The old man looked very grave, but it was a kindly gravity; and when Max held out his hand, it was taken in a hearty grasp that betokened feelings of amity.

This was a good omen, and he hailed it as a token that his wooing would meet with no more opposition in this quarter.

Old Dan resided alone no longer. Esther Morison sat beside his hearth, and she rose and curtsied as Max greeted her; but, ere half a dozen words had been exchanged, Letty, in the familiar hooded cloak, glided from the inner room, and, putting her arm in his, clung lovingly to his side.

"You see, Aunt Esther," she said, in low yet firm tones, "I have made my choice. If Max Haveryng, when he has heard my history, is still willing to make me his wife, I will consent to be his, and those are no friends of mine who oppose it."

"If I have objected, dear child," said Mrs. Morison, with a tenderness that wonderfully softened and beautified her usual sternness, "it has been for good and obvious reasons; but if you love Mr. Haveryng, and think him worthy to be trusted, I will say no more."

"Has he not proved himself deserving of my confidence?" Letty indignantly demanded.

"Will he love and watch over you, toil for you, plot for you, as I have done?" asked Mrs. Morison, earnestly. "Never, never; and yet you love this stranger, who may, after all, betray you, better, far better, than you do me!"

"Tut, Esther!" cried old Dan, laying his palm on her shoulder. "What art 'ee thinking about, wench? Isn't it always so—the young to the young, the old to the old? The lad's a good lad. What more would 'ee have?"

"If I were sure of that!" she answered, dubiously.

"I'm sure on't," returned the fisherman, sturdily. "Dan Calynack's judgment mayn't be o' the best, like his eyesight, but it helps him to know an honest man when he meets wi' one."

Letty rewarded him for his speech by running into his arms and laying her golden head on his breast, while she sobbed out her gratitude for his interference.

"Bless 'ee, bless 'ee, my dear!" the old man exclaimed, softly drawing his hand over her hair. "There's naught to thank me for. I ha' said what I think; now let Master Haveryng prove it. Tell him all; he will keep your secrets, come what will."

Letty turned once more to Max, and tremulously questioned him.

"Are you ready, then, to listen to the story of my life? It must not be told here, but in the dwelling where its saddest scenes were enacted. Let me lead you there."

She moved toward a door that Max had often noticed during his residence in the cottage, but always believed to open upon a closet in which old Dan kept such spare fishing-tackle, nets, etc., as he did not happen to require. Now, however, he saw that it led to a rude flight of steep steps, cut in the side of the cliff. Up these, directed by Letty, and closely followed by Esther Morison, Max Haveryng now accompanied his guide, till the rock-hewn staircase ended in a small plateau, about halfway to the summit of the cliffs. There a cavity, hidden by a jutting point, admitted them to a cavern of considerable extent, and Letty paused for breath.

"The former tenant of Uncle Dan's cottage," she explained, "was a smuggler, who found this cave useful as a store-house for such articles as he feared to keep in his dwelling. There is also a route from the cavern to the Abbey above, formed, it is said, in those days when gentlemen living on the coast thought it no harm to buy their wine and brandy in the dead of the night, and duty free."

"And is it to the Abbey you are about to lead me?" Max inquired.

She nodded assent; and, by the aid of the candle Esther Morison had lighted, they pursued the windings of the cave till it brought them to an aperture, through which they climbed, and followed a narrow

track between two projecting crags, till they reached the grounds surrounding Mr. Penruan's mansion.

"Then you have been an inmate of the Abbey, as well as your aunt?" said Max. "Was its owner aware of this?"

"Yes and no," was the enigmatical reply.

"And it was you who looked at me through the sliding panel on the night of my arrival?"

Letty blushed, and smiled.

"I did not startle you more than I was myself startled. The room had been long unused, for guests are rare at the Abbey, and I had been in the habit of passing through it occasionally with Aunt Esther. Neither she nor I knew of your arrival till the gleam of your lamp warned us that some person or persons were in the chamber. I have never visited it but once since, and that was when you were so ill and delirious that I prevailed upon Esther to let me share her watch beside you."

"You are taking me into the ruins!" said Max, suddenly. "Why is this?"

"Eleanor Haydon awaits us there," was the curt and not very explanatory reply. "Be patient. If I tell you all, it must be in her presence, and in my own way."

Eleanor herself appeared ere Letty had finished speaking. She had been watching for them; and as they approached, she glided down the passage Max had explored when in search of the dog.

In silence he and his companions followed, but was it his fancy that another footfall mingled with their own? He glanced behind him, but not a creature was visible; and though he could not wholly divest himself of the idea that Mr. Penruan might be watching them, he forgot the circumstance ere long in his deeper interest in Letty's revelations.

Once again he stood in that chamber in the ruins long since set apart for the unfortunate victim of the Squire's violence. As before, she lay on her cushions, her glittering eyes staring at vacancy, her expressionless face chilling him with its ghastly hue and strange rigidity.

"Was there any need to bring me here?" he said, pausing on the threshold. "I have already seen this unfortunate, and heard the cause of her sad condition. Why pain me needlessly by bringing me into her presence again?"

Even as he spoke, a strange conviction was creeping over him, that made him glance hastily from the figures of the cushions to the beautiful girl who stood beside him. Yes; he was compelled to see and acknowledge that there was some faint resemblance in the two faces: though one was hideous and sallow, and unearthly in its immobility, and the other fresh and lovely, with the hues of life and health, still he could trace this likeness, and marvel at it. Was some fiend taking the features of Letty to mock him? Involuntarily he put his arms around his betrothed, and drew her toward him, exclaiming, "I entreat you not to torture me any longer! What does this mean?"

"It means that Violet Haydon, the idiot, is no more!" cried Eleanor.

And, springing forward, she struck the figure to the ground, where it lay a waxen wreck, while the true Violet sobbed on the shoulder of her astonished lover.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

THERE was a shadow on the brow of Max Haveryng as he stood gazing down at the broken image, which had rolled to his feet. Why had this knavery been practiced, and what good purpose has ever been attained by so much trifling and deceit?

But ere he could ask these questions, Letty wiped away her tears, and, disengaging herself from his arms, moved nearer to Eleanor.

"My sister, stand by me while I tell Max why I have taken a part in acts which are so abhorrent to his franker nature, that already he begins to look coldly on me!"

"Not on *you*, my Letty?" he promptly answered. "I feel sure that it has not been of your own free will that ybu have entered upon a course which your conscience will not let you approve."

"You are right, sir. It is I who have been to blame!" exclaimed Mrs. Morison; "that is, if it can be called wrong to meet cunning with cunning, and oppose craft with craft. I mistrusted Mr. Penruan from the hour in which he made the acquaintance of my master and mistress, and wormed himself into their good-will, and as I foreboded then, so events have proved. He is a wicked and hypocritical man!"

"Need you dwell upon this?" asked Max, who felt no pleasure in hearing his kinsman abused.

"Yes, sir, I *must*, because it is necessary that you should know my reasons for what I have done. I was away, when my master, Mr. Haydon, died, for I had been summoned to the death-bed of my own mother; and though I learned afterward that the poor gentleman often asked for me, Mr. Penruan—who had already taken the management of everything—would not permit any one to send for me. When I did go back, the children had been sent away, and my mistress was fast falling into the toils that were being spread for her; indeed, I was so angry at the weakness with which she permitted herself to be persuaded into marrying again before Mr. Haydon had lain in his grave a twelvemonth, that I would have left her, only my heart yearned to the dear little girls, whom I had nursed from their birth. I felt that I might be able to be of use to them, and so I smothered my vexation and stayed on. It was owing to my promptings that, as soon as we were settled at the Abbey, Mr. Penruan sent for them home. Violet came first, and she tells me you have heard from her own lips how the aversion she testified for her stepfather angered him terribly. I scolded her for it, and tried to convince her of the prudence of striving to please him; but to no purpose. Her answer was always the same; for though a good-humored child in general, she could be very obstinate, and she would say, 'Nurse, he is a bad man; papa said so when he was dying, and so I ought not to like him.'

"You know to what a brutal act Mr. Penruan's wrath led him, and how the doctor hastily called in asserted that my poor little nursling would never thoroughly recover her senses. At my urgent request, a surgeon of more note was sent for, who confirmed the assertions of the former one; but seeing my distress, he added, to console me, that, although the brain had received a severe shock, it was just possible, as the child was so young, that she might eventually recover; and he prescribed a course of treatment, that I followed with a perseverance for which I was ultimately rewarded. While others were gradually losing their interest in the sufferer, and avoiding more and more the remote chamber in which she lay, I, who never left her, saw health, first of body, then of mind, slowly but surely returning."

While she spoke, Letty glided from her sister's side to caress the faithful attendant to whom she owed so much; and at this proof of her faithful affection, Esther's voice faltered, and after an ineffectual effort to recover herself, she was obliged to pause.

"But why did you keep this happy change a secret?" asked Max. "Mr. Penruan, if I am rightly informed, had evinced the deepest remorse for his violence."

"Ay, but his was remorse that was too short-lived to be depended on. Morning after morning he came to me with the same question, 'Is all over?' till I could not help seeing what answer he longed to hear."

"But Violet Haydon's mother had a claim to your consideration," Max persisted. "She ought to have been informed that her child was recovering."

"True, sir; and if my mistress had been allady of stronger mind, I should gladly have told her all, and sought her help in nursing my charge. But as it was, I felt that my best course was silence. I ought to warn you," she added, seeing him still look doubtful, "that Miss Violet did not get quite well all at once. It was the work of years, during which I sometimes hoped, but oftener despaired; and by the time she was thoroughly herself again, I had become so convinced of her step-father's baseness, that I dared not risk his knowing the truth."

"Why, what had you to dread?"

"Everything!" was the emphatic reply; "for it is undoubtedly true that in his last moments Mr. Haydon revoked the will that gave too much power to his false friend. When Miss Violet's memory grew clearer, she could remember the names of the persons her father mentioned as witnesses to the document. I sought them out; they were servants at the hotel where he had been staying, and though ignorant of the contents of the paper they signed, they would swear to the nature of it. While Mr. Penruan believed my charge to be hopelessly idiotic, he had nothing to fear; but Violet Haydon, restored to herself, would endanger his position, and her childish admissions had told him as much. This is why I have worked in the dark, Mr. Haveryng," she said, in conclusion. "This is why I have dreaded and watched Mr. Penruan at every opportunity."

"And with what results? Any?"

"Yes, sir. I have satisfied myself that the will is still in existence, and that Mr. Penruan hides it somewhere in the old-fashioned rosewood desk in which Mr. Haydon deposited it."

"You forget," said Max, "that if your young mistress was right about this will, and her step-father has obtained possession of it, his safest course would have been to destroy it immediately."

"Not so, sir; for there is no doubt that it provided amply for Mrs. Penruan, who is now his wife; and he is too wise to risk losing this bequest, if the other will should ever be successfully disputed."

Max shrugged his shoulders.

"I am no lawyer. I did not think of this; but pray go on."

"Well, sir, having satisfied myself that there really was another will in existence, I could understand why Mr. Penruan was always suspicious, always watching, and doubting every one about him. I saw to what a nonentity he had reduced his second wife, and the crooked policy he was pursuing toward Miss Eleanor, doing his utmost to goad her into a hasty marriage, that he might withhold her dower, and have it for himself. Had I not therefore every reason to dread what he would do if he learned that Miss Violet was of sound intellect, and able to attest, as far as her testimony would go, that the will he had proved and acted upon was not the right one?"

"You had, indeed!" Max was compelled to admit.

"Besides this," Mrs. Morison went on, "I had discovered that Mr. Penruan walked in his sleep every time anything happened that disturbed his guilty conscience; and I hoped, on one of these occasions, to track him to the place where he had hidden the desk, and get possession of its contents. So you must not be surprised that I persuaded my young lady to think with me that it would be better to keep our secret a little longer. She had no friends to whose safe keeping I could confide her, and so I did the best I could for her myself."

"I can scarcely comprehend how you succeeded in concealing the truth so long," Max observed.

"Nay, that was easy enough; for who felt any interest in an idiot girl and her nurse?" she replied, with some bitterness. "None of the servants came near us, Mr. Penruan considering me quite capable of waiting on myself. He forbade the visits of his wife and Miss Eleanor; and, to guard against the intrusion of strangers, I was careful to keep the door communicating with the library always locked. More than this, I procured the image, which, casually seen in this dimly-lighted room, might deceive others even as it deceived you. My greatest fear has always been lest Mr. Penruan should take it into his head to bring some new doctor to pronounce on the state of his step-daughter."

"But it has been a weary time!" Letty broke in; "and I thank heaven that it is over. At first, when I was weak and languid, my terror of Mr. Penruan made me give a willing assent to whatever my nurse proposed; nay, as I grew stronger, and she permitted me to descend the cliffs and visit the only person in our confidence, Daniel Calynack, I enjoyed the secrecy of these excursions, and even the disguise I wore amused me. It was not till I knew you, Max, that concealment became irksome; and when my worthy, but mistaken, friends strove to make me think with them, that Mr. Penruan had a suspicion of the truth, and you were the emissary he employed to search into it, I was wretched indeed!"

Now, Max could better understand why Esther Morison had feared and avoided him, and striven to make his betrothed do the same. With so onerous a charge upon her mind as Violet's safety, who could wonder that she hesitated to admit any person to such close intimacy with the young girl, especially a relative of the very man who was scheming to defraud her and her sister of their father's bequest?

"And you," he said, turning to Eleanor, "have you been in the plot?"

She answered in the negative.

"Not until this morning, when I came here to devote myself to an afflicted sister, did I know how little my ministrations were needed. And, in the midst of my joy at finding her so thoroughly recovered, I cannot help grieving that I should have been denied so long the precious companionship of such a sweet sister!"

Letty kissed the speaker affectionately.

"It was for your own sake, dear. We knew how much you had to endure, and that made us hesitate to embroil you still further with Mr. Penruan; so do not scold me. You would not, if you knew how often from some nook in the ruins, I have watched you flitting about your garden, or riding down the avenue, free to come and go where you pleased; while I was a poor prisoner, whose only relaxation was a stolen visit to the fisherman's cottage on the beach!"

"Ay, well, it consoles me to know that I am not the only one who has been mystified," answered Eleanor, with an arch smile. "Little did I dream that the widow Rayne our cousin Max inquired about so anxiously was a near relative of my own!"

But Mrs. Morison, impatient of the lighter tone the young girls were taking, began to ask, "What is to be done? We are not here merely to talk, but to decide upon some plan. You must recollect that I am forbidden to enter the Abbey; that Miss Eleanor cannot keep every one at bay as I have done; and if she and Miss Violet were to seclude themselves here ever so carefully, the truth must creep out ere long."

Violet—or Letty, the name for her that Max always loved best—glanced wistfully at her lover, and with a reassuring smile—for was he not her sworn champion and protector?—he drew her arm through his own.

"I will not pretend to say that I could be a match for Mr. Penruan, and therefore I eschew all schemes for his defeat. But my Letty will be just as dear to me without a fortune as with one, and the sooner she gives me a right to take care of her, the better."

"But, Eleanor?" whispered the blushing girl. "Can we go hence, and leave her sorrowful and alone?"

"Do not think of me," was the brave reply of Eleanor, who overheard the whisper. "If, like you, dear Letty, I could content myself with bread and cheese and kisses, I have the satisfaction of knowing that a faithful heart and that romantic fare are at my service, but I cannot and will not leave mamma entirely at Mr. Penruan's mercy. Neither am I so generously ready as you good people to present him with my dower. I'd much rather have the spending of it myself."

"But if we *cannot* make him, dear Nelly?" her sister queried. "If our quick-witted, indomitable Esther has failed to do it, must we waste our youth and happiness in more of this weary waiting for such a doubtful advantage as even success would be? In any exposure of Mr. Penruan's villainy, recollect that mamma would be the sufferer!"

"You, at all events, shall be set free," cried Eleanor, embracing her. "Take her away, dear Max. In old Dan's care she will be safe until you can make her your own."

But Letty clung to her sister.

"Not yet! not yet! Alas! we scarcely know each other, and would you bid me leave you already? Besides, Max must have time given him for consideration. I will not be forced upon him. Neither shall any one blame him if he hesitates to wed one whose youth has been spent under such a cloud as lowered over mine."

Max gently drew her from Eleanor's embrace to his own.

"The cloud you speak of has passed away, and if God gives me life and health, your future shall be all sunshine. Spend this night with your sister, my dear one, if you will. I shall be in the Abbey, ready to protect or counsel you to the best of my ability, if any unforeseen trouble arises. But tomorrow I shall leave here, and arrange for our marriage to take place at the earliest opportunity, at the little church at St. Erne. Once mine, I can defy Mr. Penruan or his machinations, and you and I will remain close at hand until Eleanor can resolve upon some plan for her own future.

As no better arrangement could be made, and Esther Morison was eager to see her young mistress efficiently protected, Letty's faint objections on the score of haste, etc., were overruled; and, being warned that, if he lingered much longer, Mr. Penruan would wonder what had become of him, Max bade her a tender adieu, and quitted the ruins. Again he fancied that a stealthy step fell upon his ear, and he stopped more than once to listen; but no sound was to be heard, and when he entered the hall, he was informed by a servant in attendance there that the Squire had been engaged writing in his study all the evening.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ENTRAPPED.

As his host only put his head in at the door of the drawing-room to say good-night, and Mrs. Penruan soon dozed over the game of chess Max played with her for her amusement, he also went to his room at an early hour. Too much excited to feel sleepy, he lit his pipe, opened the window, and, with arms folded on the sill, stood there, thinking over the strange occurrences that had befallen him since he came to Cornwall.

How many of them had been crowded into the short space of a few weeks! His fall from the cliff—his interview with Letty—his odd reception at Penruan and first renconter with Eleanor—and then the gradual unfolding of the evil character of the kinsman by whose hands such intricate knots were tied in the destiny of the two fair girls who had found themselves so dependent upon him.

The more Max revolved the subject in his mind, the more he revolted in spirit at the idea of letting this man remain in full possession of the property that should pertain to the orphan heiresses of Mr. Haydon. No one could be less eager than himself about money; but this was such a flagrant case of wrong-doing, that he longed to have a tussle with the usurper, and wrest from him all of which he was unjustly in possession. But how to effect this was a very difficult question; and Max—though not gifted with much worldly experience—was endowed with enough to know that he would be easily outwitted by

one who had every trick and turn of the law at his fingers' ends.

"I suppose we must leave him to run his course," was the conclusion he eventually arrived at. "He is a prematurely aged and miserable man, who, in the course of a few years at furthest, will be obliged to acknowledge that his ill-gotten gains are of very little use to him. My Letty and I will make ourselves contented at Aquas Dolces. If we can coax Eleanor and Mrs. Penruan to join us there, Charlie Renton will follow: and then, if we are all poor, we shall be happy together, and, therefore, more blessed in our poverty than Squire Penruan in all his riches."

While Max mused his pipe went out, and he was leisurely refilling it, when a low tap at his door made him pause and listen. It was repeated, and this time so imperatively that, no longer in doubt, he asked who was there.

"It is I—Eleanor! If you are still up, open quickly; if not, rise, and join us in the corridor as soon as you can."

Three or four of Max Haveryng's long strides brought him to the door, and, flinging it open, he saw that Eleanor stood there, her eyes glittering with excitement; while Letty and Mrs. Morison, muffled in dark shawls, were at no great distance.

Before he could ask what had happened, she pointed to the hall below.

"Look who goes there! Mr. Penruan himself! His evil genius has betrayed him into our hands! We have but to follow, and perhaps the desk is ours!"

Max stepped forward and glanced over the balustrade. Yes; there, lamp in hand, his eyes wildly staring, went the Squire, muttering to himself as he slowly stumbled along.

"How did you discover his condition?" the young man whispered to Eleanor, who had followed him, trembling with the agitation that she could not overcome.

"We sat talking after you left us," she explained, in the same subdued tones, "till Morison insisted that Letty and I should go to bed. But a restless spirit was upon both of us; and, instead of obeying, we persuaded her to accompany us to the study, to examine an old cabinet which belonged to my father, and in which Letty fancies the missing desk may be hidden. It was she whom Mr. Penruan saw in his study one morning when she had ventured there at a very early hour, to test her recollection of a secret spring that opened the lower part of the cabinet. You know how my maid was falsely accused of being the culprit, and how my assertions of her innocence were rudely scouted?"

Max nodded, and Eleanor went on.

"We were on our way to the study, when Mr. Penruan appeared in the corridor above, walking in his sleep, as you now see him. Pray Heaven that he unconsciously gives us this night the clew so long sought—so urgently needed!"

"I do not like dogging his steps while he is in this state," murmured Letty, with a shiver. "Let us go away, dear Nell. He might awaken suddenly, as he did when Morison was at his elbow—and then what should we do?"

"I will risk it, and alone, if no one else has courage to accompany me!" exclaimed Eleanor. "He is making for the cellars, in which Morison has convinced herself and me that he conceals the proofs of his guilt. If he enters them, I will follow, let the consequences be what they may!"

Before any one could hinder it, she boldly descended the stairs; but as she reached the foot of them, Mr. Penruan, setting down his lamp and keys, came rapidly toward her.

With a smothered shriek, Eleanor recoiled; and Max, putting aside the clinging arms of Letty, would have hastened to interpose betwixt the startled girl and her step-father; but, with the vacant gaze of somnambulism, the sleep-walker passed closely beside her, returned up-stairs, and in another minute had disappeared from their view.

Almost before he was out of sight, Eleanor, her courage returning, darted forward to seize the keys. With the same impetuous haste, she hurried to the door that had baffled Morison's curiosity, inserted one after another, till the right one was found, and ere her friends could join her, was descending the narrow flight of stone steps, with the lamp held high above her head.

Morison, as eager as herself, glided after her; but Max and Letty lingered on the threshold, for the young man recoiled from prying into the secrets even of a villain; and his betrothed, affected by the silence of the hour, the ghastly visage of Mr. Penruan, and the importance of the search in which Eleanor was engaging, could scarcely support herself.

"Are we doing right, Max?" she faltered. "Tell me—you, who are wiser than I—are we justified in doing this?"

But while she hesitated how to satisfy her scruples and his own, Eleanor's voice summoned them both.

"Max—Letty—the desk is here! I have found it hidden in an old chest. Come quickly, that we may open it together, and possess ourselves of the will."

Unable to resist the summons, they both hastened to join her. Within a small inner cellar, or vault, she was kneeling before the worm-eaten chest, which was the only movable thing it contained. From this chest, which appeared to be filled with articles of value, old plate, packets of papers, deeds, etc., she had drawn the well-remembered desk, and was wrenching it open with Morison's scissors.

The lid yielded just as Letty crouched down beside her, with Max looking over her shoulder; and ere long Eleanor, breathing thankful exclamations, extracted from the secret drawer a paper which, when unfolded, proved to be the one they sought.

Though very simply worded, it was not wanting in any forms necessary to render legal; and it set forth that the testator thereby revoked all former wills and codicils, and left the whole of his property to his co-heiresses, Eleanor and Violet Haydon, subject only to a handsome annuity which was to be paid to their mother and his beloved wife, Matilda Haydon.

The sisters kissed and embraced each other, then threw their arms round the neck of Morison, who was equally overjoyed at this discovery; but Max was not able to rejoice with them yet. He could not help thinking of the disgrace that awaited his kinsman, the unhappy man who had periled his soul and his good name—for what? An income that he was too miserly to spend; the power of amassing money which he had no son to inherit, and therefore hoarded with no other object than gloating over it, though he was continually harassing himself lest he should be defrauded of some infinitesimal part by a needy tenant or defaulting debtor.

"Are you sorry that the Widow Rayne has proved an heiress, after all?" Letty whispered to her lover, as they were preparing to quit the vault.

"Almost!" was on his lips, but ere the word was spoken, the door of the inner cellar in which they were standing swung to with a hollow sound, that startled them all.

"It is the wind," said Morison, who was shading the lamp with her hand. "It was only the wind;" but she looked very white and terrified as she spoke. "Open the door, will you, Mr. Haveryng, and let us get back to the hall, and replace the keys before they are missed?"

Max made no reply, but his face had grown as pallid as her own; for when the door closed, his quicker ear had caught the sound of a bolt shooting into its socket. He set his back against the portal, and, as he had anticipated, it resisted his every effort. *They were entrapped.* The true will was in their hands; but they were in the power of Mr. Penruan.

Bitterly did Max rue the reluctance to suspect anyone, however faulty, which had made him neglect those signs, which, to another, would have been so ominous of danger. Now that it was too late, he could no longer doubt that the step he had heard in the ruin was the wily Squire's. Mr. Penruan, always distrustful, always inquisitive, had, doubtless, been surprised at the young man's hasty retreat from the dinner-table, and must have been hovering near when he entered the ruins that night with Letty and Mrs. Morison. If he had dogged them then, and overheard their explanations, he knew that his own downfall was at hand, unless he could contrive to secure himself. But was it by murder that he intended to do this? Had he simulated sleep only to lure them into a trap from which there was no escape?

Yes, yes—it must be so! And as this terrible conviction strengthened, Max groaned in an agony that was akin to madness. For himself, death in such a shape—the slow torture of starvation—was awful, almost beyond description; but to see it shared by the innocent girl he loved, and two other creatures as helpless as herself, was horror unutterable.

"Don't look at me so strangely!" gasped Letty, who began to comprehend that something was wrong. "You are frightening Eleanor, as well as me!"

"Nonsense!" cried Eleanor, who had been too busy with the will to perceive their changed looks. "Of what should I be frightened now I know that I am able to set our tyrant at defiance?"

But she, too, grew cold with dismay when Esther Morison began to wring her hands and wail, "Oh, we were mad, mad, not to keep a better watch! He has stolen upon us while we thought of nothing but finding the desk; and who shall rescue us from this dreadful place?"

"We must be patient for a few hours, and then shout for help," said Max, speaking as cheerfully as he could. "The servants will hear our cries, and set us at liberty."

But the woman shook her head despairingly.

"They will never hear us! How could our voices reach the hall with both the doors of these vaults closed, and every precaution taken to prevent it? It is hopeless—hopeless!"

As the idea of her meaning entered Eleanor's mind, she grew frantic with terror, and beat against the walls of her cage, till her hands were bruised and bleeding.

"I will not die thus!" she raved. "Don't touch me! Don't talk to me!" And she thrust away the loving arms Letty twined about her. "I cannot be resigned to such a death just as happiness was in my reach! Oh, Charlie, Charlie, if you were but here to save me!"

But presently she grew calmer in her consciousness that all prayers, all entreaties, were unavailing, and came and knelt down beside her sister, whose face, colorless as the pure flower to which Max likened her, lay on his breast.

"And this is the end of all poor Morison's scheming, and the eager hopes in which I was indulging? But I will murmur no more. Your resignation, dearest Letty, shames me."

"I am not resigned," was the reply; "for I am still hopeful. We shall not be left to perish. Can we forget that One greater than Mr. Penruan sees us in our prison, and can save us if he so wills?"

"Letty is right," said Max, rousing himself from the stupor into which he had fallen. "We will emulate her childlike faith, and strive to be equally patient and hopeful. But first let us try whether we cannot effect our own deliverance!"

Accordingly, the walls of the vault were explored, to ascertain whether any other mode of egress could be discovered, but there was none; and when compelled to give up this hope, Max turned his attention to the door, to see whether it could be pried from its hinges. But with no tools save a penknife and Esther's scissors, what impression could he make upon solid oak and rusty iron screws? After many efforts, he was obliged to confess himself worsted.

Then it was that the prisoners, praying silently, sat down together on the hard earth, feeling that they could do no more, but must abide the issue of events. To Max and Letty there was a certain comfort in sharing whatever fate was in store for them; and when a spasm contracted the young man's features, the sweet voice of his betrothed murmured consolation.

Esther Morison had bowed her head on her knees, in the sort of apathy that sometimes renders persons of her frame of mind capable of enduring, with apparent indifference, whatever befalls them. Perhaps she grieved more for the fair girl over whom she had watched so long and tenderly than for herself. Perhaps her thoughts had flown to the cottage on the beach, where she hoped to end her days with the good old fisherman, her brother.

Eleanor Haydon was the one who suffered most intensely. Her vivid imagination pictured Charles Renton's astonishment when he learned that she had disappeared at the same time with Max Haveryng, and it added poignancy to the anguish of such a separation to know that if she perished in this captivity, he might go to his own grave believing her to have falsely fled with the Californian. Even supposing suspicions of something wrong were aroused, and a search for the missing ones instituted, who would imagine that they were still in the Abbey? Who would reveal to Charles Renton the terrible truth that after hours of such sufferings, both mental and bodily, as no pen could describe, Eleanor—his Eleanor—had died miserably in her own home?

As if to complicate the horror of their position, the lamp, a small chamber one, began to burn dimly. When that went out they would be left in total darkness; and though it was carefully lowered to a mere glimmer, they knew that no very lengthened period would elapse before the moment they dreaded arrived.

Before this occurred, Max looked at his watch. Slowly though the hours had moved, morning must have dawned in the blue sky on which their eyes might never gaze again. The few servants employed in the house must be up and about their customary vocations, and Max shouted long and lustily, in the hope that through some cranny or crevice the sounds might make their way, and bring succor. But though he repeated his calls till he was hoarse, no answering voice was heard; and even Eleanor, the last to acknowledge the uselessness of his efforts, muttered: "It is in vain—man has forsaken us!"

And then the lamp suddenly flickered and went out, and Max could no longer behold the dear eyes that met his own so lovingly, nor Eleanor gather renewed patience from the sweet composure that sat on Letty's pure, pale face. But the rebellious cry on her lips was stifled by the sweet notes of Letty's voice, and though she could not join in the hymns the young girl sung with such unfaltering tones, her murmurings were stilled.

Letty sung on till she was overpowered with weariness. Her eyes insensibly closed, and she sunk into a slumber as profound and peaceful as she had ever enjoyed. And Max, as he tenderly sustained her and listened to her quiet breathing, was almost ready to pray that she might never again awaken to the dreadful reality. He tried to speak consolation to Eleanor, whose sobs distracted him, but the meaningless words died on his tongue, and it was an unspeakable relief when she, too, became so silent that he had reason to believe she had succumbed to the fatigue and agitation of the last few hours as well as her sister.

Without following the example of his weary companions, Max had suffered his thoughts to wander away to his distant home, and, half-dozing, half-waking, was beholding once more the sun sink behind the mountains that sheltered the beautiful valley in which it lay, when, as if subjected to an electric shock, he suddenly leaped to his feet.

Letty, who was still clasped in his arms, awoke, demanding fearfully what was the matter, but the question elicited no reply. Shaking from head to foot, his heart throbbing madly, he uttered one sharp "Hush!" and then stood listening—listening with an eagerness that scarcely suffered him to draw breath.

What had he heard? Anything? or had his excited imagination played him some cruel trick? Just as Letty had decided that the latter must be the true explanation of his condition, a human voice, heard faintly, yet not to be mistaken, fell upon the ears of the captives.

"There is nothing here," it said; "so let us go."

Oh! the frantic ring of the wild, appealing cries that these words evoked! Even Esther Morison was aroused from her apathy, and shrieked for help as loudly as the rest.

Were they heard? Would the help they invoked be given? or was it Mr. Penruan himself, who, mocking their agony, came but to depart again, leaving them to redoubled gloom and despair?

No, no! eager hands were at work at the bolts, and keys were brought and fitted to the lock, till, with a click, it opened, and Eleanor, hysterical in her joy, rushed out into the light of day and the embrace of Charlie Renton.

CHAPTER XXX.

A HAPPY DELIVERANCE FROM ALL TROUBLES.

Like one stupefied with astonishment, stood Captain Renton, staring first at the sobbing girl in his arms, and then at Esther Morison and Max, who, half-blinded by the light, and burdened with the now fainting Letty, came from the inner vault, uttering fervent and grateful thanks to him for coming to their assistance.

"Do not give me praises which I have done nothing to merit," he answered, at length. "How could I know that Eleanor and you were shut in that dismal hole? Good heavens! what does it mean?"

"More air—let us have fresher air before we stay to explain!" cried Mrs. Morison, pointing out the condition of Letty. "Let us leave these dungeons before Mr. Penruan can learn that we are free."

Accordingly, they ascended to the hall; but here another pause was made, for the old gardener, who had been Captain Renton's sole companion, astonished them by observing, "Mr. Penruan is not at the Abbey; he left here before nine this morning."

Max glanced at the clock; it was now noon, and as his companions were exhausted for want of food, he would have summoned some of the servants to bring refreshments, but another surprise awaited him. The domestics had been discharged, their wages paid that were due to them, and they had all quitted the Abbey before their master departed.

"What reason did Mr. Penruan give for these extraordinary proceedings?" asked Eleanor.

The old man scratched his head.

"Well, miss, no offense, but he said it was on your account he were going."

"On mine?"

"Yes, miss. The servants was rung up at daybreak, and told that you had gone off with Mr. Haveryng, and that master must go in pursuit without delay. It was all bustle and hurry-scurry, and the mistress, so I heard say, was almost in fits, she was so shocked and upset. Her maid, too, declared that it was quite impossible for her to get ready at such short notice. But the Squire he swore a great oath, that, packed or not packed, he'd go away by the first train; and he kept his word, he did, and saw every one out of the house before he went out; except me and my wife, that's left in the house, you see, miss and gentlemen, to take care of it till further orders."

His auditors glanced at each other. Had Mr. Pen-

ruan deliberately left them there to die, and hurried away from the scene of his crime, lest remorse should seize him ere it was fully consummated?

"Did he leave no message for any one? Was it by his commands you were searching the cellars?" asked Eleanor.

"Nay, miss; he wrote a letter just before he went, which he bade me post for the captain here; but he come afore I could send it away."

"Yes," said Captain Renton; "I left London immediately on the receipt of your telegram, traveled all night, and arrived at the Abbey about an hour after its owner had so suddenly left it. My first impulse, I will own"—and now he colored deeply—"was to follow Mr. Penruan, and aid him in discovering whither the fugitives had flown."

"Charlie! Did you, then, believe the shameful story of my flight?" Eleanor reproachfully demanded.

"My dear love, what was I to think?"

"Think anything but that your friends were false, either to themselves or you! However, I will for once be merciful, and let your own conscience punish you. Violet, this gentleman, who is so very ready to suspect your sister and your affianced husband, scarcely wants an introduction to you; but as I have chosen to forgive him, I must beg you to be equally indulgent."

It cost some time, and a lengthened explanation, to make Charles Renton comprehend that the beautiful young creature who gave him her hand with such blushing grace, was the unfortunate whose name had been rarely spoken for so many years; and Eleanor was so impatient to question him further, that she would scarcely give him time to utter his congratulations to her pretty sister.

"The letter that was to be forwarded to you—pray show it us! What could be Mr. Penruan's motives for making you his confidant?"

Captain Renton looked puzzled as he drew forth the epistle.

"I can scarcely say that he did so, for his note—it is nothing more—is so mysteriously worded, that, had I received it in town, as he intended that I should, I doubt very much whether it would have brought me to Cornwall!"

"Do not tell me that!" exclaimed Eleanor, with a shudder. "Recollect that we must inevitably have perished if you had not come! But what does Mr. Penruan say?"

"Simply this: 'I am about to leave England, perhaps forever; my motives for what I have done do not concern you or any one else; every man has a right to take care of his own interests in whatever way he thinks best. I have, I hope, secured mine; and so I can afford to be more merciful than those who have dogged and distrusted me deserve that I should be. When this reaches you, you can go to Penruan, and ask the gardener for the packet I left with him, directed to you. Within it are some keys; open the doors they fit; and do your worst, or best, I care not!'"

"Then, after all, he did not mean us to die!" cried Max, with an air of relief. "He evidently meditated nothing more than to give us a good fright!"

"But how if Charlie, believing that no one was left in the Abbey, had neglected the injunction contained in this very enigmatical letter?" asked Eleanor; and every one looked grave and declined replying, for how could they forget on what a seeming chance their fate had depended? If Captain Renton, thirsting for revenge, had followed his first impulse, and rushed away in pursuit of the supposed fugitives, what would have become of the imprisoned party? It was well for them all that, conjecturing Mr. Penruan's locked doors to contain some papers or parchments of importance to Eleanor, he had tried cabinets, and escritoires, and closets, until, chancing to discover that one of the keys fitted the half-hidden door in the hall, he reminded himself that misers sometimes choose strange hiding-places, and descended with Jones to examine the cellars.

"Let us be thankful our lives have been preserved!" Letty was the first to say; "and not inquire too curiously into Mr. Penruan's intentions. It seems to me of far more consequence to ascertain whither he purposes dragging our poor mother, and how she will fare at his hands when he is compelled to give up the property he had so basely appropriated."

Both Max and Captain Renton felt a little remorse at their utter forgetfulness of Mrs. Penruan, who was so helplessly in the power of her unprincipled husband; and, after a long consultation, it was determined that the two young ladies, accompanied by Esther Morison, should depart for London forthwith, there to put themselves under the protection of a matronly friend of Eleanor's until Mr. Haydon's last will could be proved, and his daughters obtained possession of their property.

Max and Charlie Renton went to town by the same train, and communicated immediateiy with a clever lawyer. Through his agency, before another week had elapsed, they learned that Mr. Penruan, after turning everything he could lay his hands upon into cash, raising money upon valuable securities, and even selling the costly jewelry of his wife, was on the point of embarking for some far distant country. He had decided on this course as soon as he made the alarming discovery that Violet Haydon was not the helpless idiot whom he had regarded as a nonentity; and he carried away with him so large a portion of his ill-gotten gains, that he would be wealthy despite the necessity of relinquishing what no cunning would enable him to retain longer.

Still, those he had injured and despoiled so shamelessly that the lawyers exclaimed in astonishment at the audacity of his proceedings, hesitated to put the hounds of justice upon his track. For Mrs. Penruan's sake, they proposed to let him go free, and content themselves with knowing that he could never molest or wrong them again; and when the vessel sailed in which he had taken a passage, it was agreed by common consent that his name should never be spoken more.

But even Max, the most clement of them all—the one who had striven most earnestly to palliate his kinsman's conduct—was stirred with indignation when, by the merest chance, it was discovered that, although Mr. Penruan had been careful to convey his wife's luggage on board, he had been equally careful to leave the wife herself behind him, regarding her, it is presumed, as an incumbrance he preferred to be without.

Her anxious daughters found the poor lady in a squalid lodging at Wapping; her health really affected by the atmosphere in which she was living, and her terror of the drunken landlady, who was robbing her of the very small sum of money she possessed. Too inert to do anything but pity herself, she thankfully hailed the appearance of Eleanor, and soon learned to cling for comfort and support to that other daughter, who now claimed a share of her affection.

By very slow degrees, Mrs. Penruan was made to believe that she was not the helpless invalid she had imagined herself; when this had been accomplished she soon became stout and rosy; and, in the course of years, developed into a tolerably fair specimen of a grandmamma to half a dozen noisy, merry children. She wept so bitterly when an effort was made to reveal to her the treacherous conduct of Mr. Penruan, that Charlie Renton, to whom the task was deputed, was silenced; and it is doubtful whether she ever thoroughly understood how basely he had acted.

When he was drowned during a gale in sight of the land to which he had fled, his widow, the only person who did not regard his fate as just retribution, insisted on erecting a handsome monument to his memory in the church at St. Erne; and it was noticed that though she never named him to Eleanor or Letty, she spoke of him to others with bated breath, as a remarkable man, whose decease was a great loss to every one who knew him. It was a happy delusion, and her friends permitted her to indulge in it.

As soon as the co-heiresses had been put in possession of their property with all due legality, Eleanor and Charles Renton, Violet and her faithful Max, were quietly married at St. Erne, old Dan Calynack being one of the most interested spectators of the ceremony; and Max bore his bride to his home across the sea. But Aquas Dolces, despite its loveliness, was no fit abode for a gentle lady. A tribe of hostile Indians had settled in the neighborhood, and were constantly perpetrating such atrocious deeds, that the young couple finally returned to England.

St. Erne and its lovely scenery was so dear to them, that after a few weeks spent in London with the gay Eleanor, who was soon fairly launched in society, and promising to be one of its most brilliant ornaments, they hastened to the Abbey. But the dwelling itself revived so many hateful reminiscences, that it was was finally determined to pull it down.

Accordingly, this was done, and a handsome mansion erected in its stead. No traces remain of the chamber in the ruins where the faithful Esther guarded her fragile flower from the eyes of Mr. Penruan; and the memory of his ill deeds has been almost effaced by the purer lives and generous acts of those who now hold the estate.

Captain and Mrs. Renton often revisit the spot, and make the new house gay with their lively doings; but better known and better loved in the little fishing village, which is fast rising into a busy town under the auspices of Max Haveryng, is the Californian's fair wife—the gentle but queenly Letty, whom her adoring husband still, in moments of enthusiasm, calls by the name he first gave her—the Lily-flower of St. Erne!

THE END.

Celebrated Weddings.

HISTORY and tradition have handed down to us wonderful accounts of the magnificent ceremonials and the gorgeous raiments which have signalized the weddings of bygone days, though some of the high-born dames of old have stood at the altar simply attired. When Louis XIII married Ann of Austria, her robe was white satin, and her hair was simply dressed, without crown or wreath. Isabella of Portugal, as the bride of Burgundy, wore a dress of splendid embroidery, a stomacher of ermine, tight sleeves, a cloak bordered with ermine, falling from her shoulders to the ground; but she had no ornaments, and her head-dress was white muslin. When Ann of France, finding the Archduke Maximilian tardy in his wooing, gave herself and dominions to Charles VIII, she appeared at the imposing ceremonial of her marriage in a robe of cloth of gold, with designs in raised embroidery upon it, and bordered with priceless sable. James I nearly ruined himself in order to celebrate the marriage of his daughter, the Princess Elizabeth; and great and determined was the opposition shown by his subjects to the marriage tax he raised to defray the £53,294 it cost. The ceremony took place at Whitehall with so much pomp that it has formed the precedent for all other royal weddings in England which have followed. The train of the bride's dress, which was of silver cloth, cost £130. Her hair floated on her shoulders intermingled with pearls and diamonds, and a crown of gold was on her head.

Perhaps, however, the marriage of Henry I. with Matilda of Scotland bears off the palm, so far as outward splendor is concerned. Bishop Anslem performed the ceremony in presence of all the beauty and chivalry of the realm. The marriage of Edward I in Canterbury Cathedral was little less magnificent.

The Paris papers have recently been giving some curious and interesting details respecting costly articles of dress or ornament possessed by the royal and noble ladies of Europe.

The young Countess de San Fernando possesses, it seems, a lace tunic, the like of which is owned by no other lady in the world, Queen Isabella alone excepted. Her Most Catholic Majesty has, it would appear, a perfect passion for lace, and possesses thereof a collection which is valued at over $1,000,000. This collection is a perfect museum of lace of all kinds, epochs and nationalities. One dress alone, composed entirely of point d'Alencon, is valued at $20,000, and there is a set of flounces in antique guipure which is even more costly. Of the Spanish mantilla vails her Majesty owns a large number, some of which are worth from $5,000 to $6,000 each. Queen Victoria's passion is for India shawls, and her collection equals in value the laces of Queen Isabella. It includes shawls, the art of making which has long been lost—besides all the finest and most delicate marvels of the India looms of the present day, including webs of golden thread and embroidered with diamonds and pearls. In respect to jewels, the Empress Elizabeth of Austria possesses the finest emeralds ever worn by woman. They are mounted in the guise of a diadem, necklace and girdle of flowers, whereof the leaves are formed of single emeralds, and the blossoms are composed of diamonds. The Grand Duchess of Saxe Weimar owns the richest and most perfect collection of jewels in the world. The finest and largest turquoises and pearls that exist among the crown jewels of Russia, and the finest sapphires in the world form a part of those of England. Bavaria possesses among her crown jewels a parure of pink diamonds that is perfectly unique.

THE MARRIAGE OF JAMES OF SCOTLAND.

Margaret Tudor, when married to James of Scotland, stood proudly at the altar, as her noble lineage warranted, a crown on her head, her hair hanging beneath it, covered only by a cap of gold, and with pearls about her neck. The ill-fated union of Philip and Mary was solemnized at Winchester Cathedral, as befitted the sovereigns of two great countries. Charles I was married by proxy at Notre Dame. George III signalized his marriage with Queen Charlotte, which took place at St. James Chapel Royal, by abolishing many of the practices which then held good, but which were opposed to modern taste and feeling. St. James Chapel Royal has been the scene of more royal marriages in modern days than perhaps any other edifice, though it is small and inconvenient. Queen Anne, also William IV, were wedded here; and here George IV was married, at ten o'clock at night. Queen Victoria was married at the same place on the 10th of February, 1840.

The value of the wedding gifts of Mdlle. d'Albe, niece of the ex-Empress Eugenie, is said to be worth $1,600,000. One of these was a cameo ring which belonged to Charles V. Eleven necklaces of brilliants adorned the collection. The Duke d'Ossuna, whom she married, is said to be one of the wealthiest persons in the Peninsula.

Among the Earl of Dudley's presents to Miss Moncrieffe before she became his bride were a diamond diadem which had been the envy and admiration of all Paris, said to be worth $30,000; a bracelet of fifty precious stones of singular purity, which Prince Albert had tried to bargain for in vain; another bracelet, with a diamond of "fabulous price" in the center, and a collection of varied assortment additionally. On the wedding morning he presented her with a necklace of five rows of pearls of enormous value, and she wore a dress which contained 2,000 yards of point d'Alencon lace, and employed 600 hands in the making, and was so costly that the Empress Eugenie, for whom it was intended, was obliged to decline it. The noble acquaintances of Miss Moncrieffe, of course, loaded her with presents, and the inhabitants of Dudley begged her acceptance of a bracelet worth 500 guineas. The marriage of the Prince of Chimay, the heir to one of the greatest houses in France, to Mdlle. Lejeune, a lovely blonde, with a fortune of $5,000,000, left to her by her grandfather, the young Michel, once a famous banker, not long since elicited much comment. The Paris papers are full of details of her trousseau. Her lingerie alone is valued at 100,000 francs, including 24 pairs of sheets, embroidered by hand with the Caraman arms, each costing from 4,000 to 5,000 francs; a fan in Venice point, enriched with diamonds and bearing in the center the arms of Caraman and Chimay; and among her jewelry is a necklace consisting of one circle of forty-two brilliants with their inner circles, each consisting of thirty-seven brilliants, with a magnificent emerald as a medallion, and three superb brilliants as pendants.

A good anecdote is related of a lady at a party, whose dress and form were faultless. Just before dinner an admirer offered her a flower from his buttonhole. The dress being fastened behind, the flower had to be adjusted with a pin. Just then they went down to dinner, and the gentleman thought he heard a noise as though wind were escaping from a bellows. The lady had soon lost her fair proportions, and the tightly-fitting dress was almost baggy. It appears that the latest fashion for thin ladies' dresses is an air-tight lining blown out to the proper size. The pin to keep the flower in place had penetrated the air-tight lining and caused a grand collapse.

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